# THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

# THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

OR

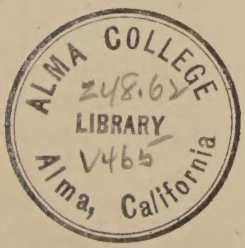
ASCETICAL NOTES AND REFLECTIONS
FOR PRIESTS

BY THE

RT. REV. JOHN S. VAUGHAN, D.D.

TITULAR BISHOP OF SEBASTOPOLIS AND AUXILIARY BISHOP
OF SALFORD

VOLUME II




NEW YORK
JOSEPH F. WAGNER, INC.
LONDON: B. HERDER

865

**Nihil Obstat:**

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.
*Censor Librorum*

**Imprimatur:**

✠PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES
*Archbishop of New York*

NEW YORK, February 19, 1926

COPYRIGHT, 1926, BY JOSEPH F. WAGNER, NEW YORK
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# CONTENTS

## Volume II


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XXI. | The Pastoral Office: The Tribunal of Penance . . . . | 1 |
| XXII. | The Pastoral Office: Preaching . . . . . | 16 |
| XXIII. | The Pastoral Office: How We Should Preach . . . . . | 32 |
| XXIV. | The Pastoral Office: Children | 46 |
| XXV. | The Presence of God . . . . | 59 |
| XXVI. | Devotion to the Blessed Virgin | 72 |
| XXVII. | The Realization of the Divine Attributes . . . . . | 83 |
| XXVIII. | The Infinite Beauty of God . | 97 |
| XXIX. | The Infinite Power of God . . | 110 |
| XXX. | The Omniscience or Infinite Wisdom of God . . . . . | 124 |
| XXXI. | Infinite Goodness and Infinite Love. I . . . . . | 139 |
| XXXII. | Infinite Goodness and Infinite Love. II. . . . . | 154 |
| XXXIII. | Confidence in God . . . . . | 169 |
| XXXIV. | Motives for Pastoral Zeal . . | 180 |
| XXXV. | The Immolation of Oneself to God . . . . . | 197 |

CHAPTER PAGE

XXXVI. Almighty God Considered as Our Father . . . . . 207

XXXVII. The Blessed Sacrament . . . 218

XXXVIII. The Glorious Angels of God . 233

XXXIX. On the Merit of the Most Ordinary Actions . . . . . 248

XL. On the End of Creatures . . 260

XLI. How to Lay up Treasures for Heaven . . . . . 277

XLII. Immortality . . . . . 291

XLIII. The Thought of Eternity . . 304

# THE MINISTER OF CHRIST

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PASTORAL OFFICE: THE TRIBUNAL OF PENANCE

*"Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them"* (John, xx. 23).

OF the many sacred duties that fall to the lot of priests on the mission, there is hardly one which is so important, so arduous, and at the same time so full of consolation as that of hearing confessions. If there be some alas! who do not relish the task as much as they should, it is surely because they fail fully to grasp the wholly supernatural power which they wield, the immense benefits they confer, and the honor and glory they thereby give to God.

Indeed, it is almost impossible for any priest to realize the startling effects and the almost unlimited results of his own acts, because, while

he himself is living and acting in this material and visible world, all the great effects of his ministry take place in *another*—that is to say, in the spiritual and invisible world where he can neither watch nor follow them. Every priest who is exercising his duty properly is constantly working wonders that are but little regarded by himself. But, if it be true that he is really performing the most stupendous miracles all through his life, it may certainly be asserted that he performs far more in the tribunal of Penance than anywhere else. These miracles of grace are impervious to the senses, and therefore, of course, do not strike the imagination as miracles in the natural order do, but, *as a matter of plain fact,* they are immeasurably more wonderful and indicate a vastly greater delegated power.

Just think what an effect our Blessed Lord must have produced upon those who actually witnessed Him raise the widow's only son to life. Or picture Him standing before the open sepulchre in which the body of Lazarus had lain for over four days, and listen to Him commanding it to "come forth" (John, xi. 43). Hush! Not a sound! See how intently the multitude watch and wonder. Look, how excitedly they turn their eyes, first on the corrupt

and fetid corpse, now disintegrating, and then on our Lord, whose voice bade it come forth, and live again. "Ah! He may call," the multitude say within themselves, "but will the dead heed His summons? Will the dead, whom even the harsh thunder's loudest roar cannot arouse from their deep sleep, arise at the gentle voice of the calling Christ?" Many, no doubt, falter and hesitate; but, see! the body begins to move! Look! Lazarus is rising from the bier. Oh wonder of wonders! He stands! He walks!! He speaks!!! They actually see him stepping into the sunshine and drawing in the pure air, and they are all deeply impressed. This was a great miracle, and helped, no doubt, to confirm their faith in our Lord's divinity. But, venerable Brethren, to restore to the life of grace a soul spiritually dead is a far greater miracle, and supposes a vastly superior power.[1]

If only we could realize what we do when we pronounce the words of absolution over a soul in mortal sin, how earnestly should we thank God for conferring upon us such a stupendous power, and how gladly should we make use of every opportunity of exercising it! Though it is God and no other that actually cleanses the

[1] *Miraculum proprie dicitur, cum aliquid fit præter ordinem naturæ.*

soul, and restores it to life, yet we do not say "*Deus* te absolvat," but "*Ego* te absolvo" (*Ego*, auctoritate ipsius, te absolvo), because we are the ministers of Christ, and, in a certain sense, identified with Him. It is very much for the same reason that we say, in the Holy Mass, not "Hoc est corpus *Christi*," but "Hoc est corpus *meum*."

Just think what a joy it would be to us, if we were able to free some dear friend from horrible torture and life-long imprisonment in a low dismal dungeon, and were given authority to tear up the writ that had been issued for his apprehension. How delighted we should be whenever we were able to make use of this marvelous privilege to free our friends from the awful punishments due to their crimes! Yet this but very feebly suggests what every priest does whenever he administers the Sacrament of Penance. I have always felt that it would help us very much to perform such duties fervently and readily and willingly, if we were only to exercise our imagination a little. When I find a penitent kneeling before me, and accusing himself (or herself) of some serious breach of God's law, I seem to behold hell open and the raging fires rising, in dreadful rage, impatient to devour him. I seem to see him hanging over

the bottomless pit, suspended solely by the slender and uncertain thread of life which any accident may snap. Not only do I long to free him from that perilous position, but I rejoice to know that I have been raised to the dignity of the priesthood, by the merciful providence of God, for that special purpose. Thus, by a few simple words, I there and then rescue him from a fate too appalling for words, and my faith is stirred as I watch in spirit the tremendous gates of hell closing, and the golden portals of God's own enchanting home thrown wide open to welcome the happy penitent in so soon as ever death shall overtake him, let it be at any moment.

When the Prophet Elias restored to life the son of the poor woman of Sarepta, it was of course God and not he who performed the miracle, but how greatly he rejoiced at being the instrument in God's hands for such a purpose! So, when we call a dead soul back to life, the work is truly God's and not ours, yet how much greater should be our joy than that of Elias that we have been chosen to restore not one only, but many sons and daughters to the much higher life of grace!

In the administration of the Sacrament of Penance, we are in a most special manner the dispensers of the mercies of God. We rescue

our own flesh and blood from the grasp of the devil. We reconsecrate the temples of God which the foul fiend has polluted. The prodigal, who had strayed and squandered his goods, has returned home, and now kneels in penitence at our feet; the gifts and the graces of innocence have been recklessly squandered, spiritual poverty and nakedness are his portion, and squalid and filthy is the spirit within him. And, if he be the prodigal, we represent the father who for joy at the prodigal's return threw himself upon his neck and kissed him. Then, we perform the office of the servant of that father, for we bring the new robe and we array him in a garb of such an unearthly beauty that, throughout the heavenly courts above, resound the jubilee of angels for the sinner who is reconciled to God. "Oh, Brother-priest," cries out Bishop Moriarty, "were it given to you, by a singular privilege, once in a year, or once in a life-time, to unbolt the gates of hell and to draw from that abyss one damned soul and to transfer it to heaven, with what raptures of joy you would execute such a ministry of mercy! I tell you, Brother, you can do more, for not once in your life, not once in a year, but every day, every hour, and many times in an hour, you may save a soul from hell. You may do even more,

for it is a more blessed thing to prevent than to relieve a suffering" (cfr. "Allocutions," p. 17).

In the sacred tribunal the priest exercises the duties of judge, of physician, and of father (*judicis, doctoris aut medici, et patris*), and is expected to possess the fairness and the firmness of the judge, the knowledge and experience of the physician so as to be able to distinguish *inter causam et causam, lepram et lepram* (Deut., xvii. 8), and above all the charity, the tenderness and the solicitude of the most devoted of fathers.

To fulfill as we ought these three offices, it is necessary that we should not only exercise patience, charity and prudence, but it is essential that we should be well grounded in theology, especially moral theology and ascetical and mystical theology. As the physician of countless different souls of every hue and complexion, we must know how to direct them, and how to help and encourage them upwards and onwards to a greater and ever greater degree of sanctity and perfection, for, under a wise and really competent director, a zealous penitent will follow the "path of the just, which, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day" (Prov., iv. 18). How sad it is to think

of the many souls whose chances of even heroic sanctity have been either frustrated or at all events much impeded and hindered by reason of their director's ignorance, or at least imperfect acquaintance with mystical theology!

But our aim in writing these chapters is not to instruct the clergy on the administration of the Sacraments, for which we trust there can be no need, but merely to suggest thoughts which may increase their appreciation of their priestly office and may help their own sanctification.

Let us now consider the Sacrament of Penance from this point of view. That it is a source of sanctity to the penitent, goes without saying. But it is also a very true source of sanctity to the conscientious confessor as well, if he will only allow it to be so. In the first place, he exercises the two great and important virtues of mortification and of charity. To sit quietly in the cramped-up confessional, listening to one penitent after another, hour after hour, sometimes until far into the night, is no light task. It is an act of real penance and self-denial, and to be offered up to God in satisfaction for one's own sins and offenses. It is quite as severe a mortification and as acceptable to God, if undertaken in a proper spirit, as fasting or the discipline; it may certainly be turned to good account

by any earnest priest, and will help very considerably to shorten his purgatory. This is Father T. E. Bridgett's description of a priest's work in the confessional, and is worth recording (he is speaking, of course, of the Redemptorists, but his words are applicable *pro rata* also to the secular confessor): "A life in a box thirty inches square. Long hours in a little case, unable to stretch the limbs, leaning uneasily on one side; consuming foul air, in a hot and foul church, or in icy draughts; burnt up in summer, starved in winter, with the mind on a perpetual strain like a student for honors in his final examination; hearing things one would gladly forget; straining to catch whispers, and speaking in whispers for hours together; under a sense of awful responsibility; turning from side to side, now engaged with an enormous sinner, then with a scrupulous soul: sometimes listening to voluble nonsense, and unable to stop the torrent or get to the point: then fighting with a soul possessed by the dumb devil, and getting out one sin in ten minutes, like a rotten cork from a bottle, etc.—no one has a conception what a (1) *physical,* (2) *mental,* and (3) *spiritual* torture it all is" (cfr. Ryder, "Life of T. E. Bridgett, C.SS.R.," p. 123).

But to hear confessions is also to exercise the

highest charity, the very greatest of all the virtues. In fact, a zealous priest, sitting in his confessional-box, may truly be said to exercise, not one only, but all the spiritual works of mercy.[2] He consoles the afflicted; he instructs the ignorant; he gives wise advice and counsel to those who are in doubt; he frees sinners from their sins; he strengthens the good to persevere; he encourages such as are aspiring after true sanctity to make yet stronger and stronger efforts, and helps in a thousand ways to extend the kingdom of Christ and to encourage the pusillanimous and the faint-hearted, who, but

[2] Since writing the above, we have come across the following passage which expresses *yet more fully* the consoling truth, and is well worth adding as a note: "The practice of hearing confessions is an heroic act, which is highly pleasing to God. First, because it enables the confessor to convert souls. Secondly, because in it he exercises all the works of spiritual mercy, and of corporal ones spiritually. There he teaches the ignorant, corrects the erring, forgives injuries, comforts the sorrowful, entreats God for the living, and gives good advice." So likewise is it with the Corporal Works of Mercy, in a spiritual manner, for he "redeems the captives, looses prisoners, by forgiving them their sins: he clothes the naked with the robe of grace: he gives food and drink to the needy, when he procures for them the graces and blessings which this great Sacrament confers and which nourish the soul, and give it strength to persevere. Hence, we may feel assured that he who is faithful and zealous in the discharge of this most important duty of hearing confessions, will obtain mercy himself, when he most needs it, according to the words of St. Matthew (v. 7): *Beati misericordes, quoniam ipsi misericordiam consequentur*" (see "Lights in Prayer," by La Puente and others, p. 48).

for his earnest words, might faint on the way and give up the struggle as useless.

The confessional affords the priest wonderful opportunities of dealing with the special needs and difficulties of individual souls, so that he should take the greatest interest and pains to help them. We fear that many priests show a most lamentable indifference to such opportunities, and too often dismiss the penitent, especially if many others are waiting to be heard, with scarcely one word of advice or of encouragement, which is a great mistake.

Cardinal Manning writes that the Sacrament of Penance is a school in which many great truths are taught. "All the treatises of the Salmanticenses cannot teach a priest what his confessional is always teaching." If he has the humility to learn, continues the Cardinal, it will teach him five great truths:

*First,* self-knowledge;

*Second,* contrition for his own sins;

*Third,* delicacy of conscience;

*Fourth,* a longing to advance, and to draw nearer to God;

*Fifth,* self-accusation at his own unprofitableness.

These are mere headings. The Cardinal develops them in his "Eternal Priesthood" (pp.

104-105), which may be profitably consulted.

Here it may be well to strike a little note of warning, for even the administration of the Sacrament of Penance is not without its dangers, so that a confessor should exercise great prudence and care in order to run no risks. Of course the *grâce d'état* may be relied on, and he will be preserved from all dangers by the providence of God, if he act with *purity of intention,* and with the *sole desire of pleasing God.* Indeed, this seems to be one of those cases in which is realized the promise of Christ: "And if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark, xvi. 18). As Father Faber observes: "Confessors drink poison while they drink in the sins of their penitents in the confessional, and it harms them not. Memory loses the power to hold the facts, as it holds other facts: the images fade from off the imagination as fast as they are written upon it: the understanding becomes blessedly inert, and does no more than the judgment of penance there and then requires, while the will seems to change its nature, and, when the flames are held to it, it will not burn. This is one of the many ways in which it is given us to feel and handle grace palpably, so that we walk herein by sight rather than by faith. It is one of the daily

miracles which are being worked always in the secret places of the Church of God" (cfr. "An Essay on the Characteristics of the Lives of the Saints," p. 88).

In addition to the good done to the penitent and also to himself, it is well to consider the enormous benefit the zealous confessor confers upon society and upon the world at large. Who indeed will reckon up the number of restitutions that have been made, the wounds that have been healed, the damaged or lost characters that have been recovered, the injustices that have been rectified, and the debts paid through the instrumentality of the sentences passed in the sacred tribunal of Penance? How many reconciliations have taken place, and how many bitter enmities have ended, because the sincere penitent finds absolution withheld, *until the requisite conditions have been fulfilled?* Referring to the results arising from the insistence on auricular confession, especially in the Mediæval Church when all were Catholic, Mr. G. O'Brien reminds us that although "the avaricious merchant, the fraudulent dealer, or the oppressor of the poor might succeed in evading the keenest regulations of the *civil* power, yet, sooner or later, he was driven to disclose his wrong-doing to a tribunal which had the power to order resti-

tution under pressure of the most terrible sanctions. It would be difficult," he truly observes, "to exaggerate the social importance of such an institution, or the social loss involved in its disappearance" ("Essay on the Economic Effects of the Reformation," pp. 47-48). And the famous Balmes writes: "By the abolition of this sacrament, Protestants have given up one of the most legitimate, powerful, and gentle means of rendering human conduct conformable to the principles of sound morality" ("Protestantism and Catholicism Compared," p. 129). But no appeal to such authorities is really necessary to convince any reasonable man who understands the working of this Sacrament that it is a most powerful and practical means of good for the whole community, no less than for the priest, who administers it, and for the penitent, who receives it.

In conclusion, then, let us excite within our hearts the greatest esteem for the Sacrament of Penance, and look upon it as the height of privileges to fulfill the office of father and physician and judge. We must fit ourselves for the responsible task by assiduous study, for "the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and the people shall seek the law at his mouth" (Mal., ii. 7). In fact, if we refuse the custody of this sacred treasure, God forbids us the exercise of

His ministry, saying: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt not do the office of priesthood to Me" (Osee, iv. 6).

But, though there may be much to make us anxious in a work of such tremendous importance and where eternal interests are at stake, yet there is also much, thank God, to cheer, encourage and console us. For it enables us to snatch many a brand from the burning, and to rescue many a poor sinner from hell-fire, and so to win the prize offered by our Divine Master, when He promised that "whosoever shall cause a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall *save his own soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins*" (James, v. 20).

Yes, when you think of the stupendous power God has given you, think also of the magnificent reward. We are told that the disciples returned to their Master rejoicing that the devils had been obliged to depart at their bidding. But our Divine Lord bade them look forward to something far better and brighter still. "Rejoice not in this, that the evil spirits are subject to you; but rejoice in this, *that your names are written in heaven*" (Luke, x. 20).

Let us so live that we may deserve to find our names written in the Book of Life.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE PASTORAL OFFICE: PREACHING

*"It pleased God by the foolishness of our preaching to save them that believe"* (I Cor., i. 21).

OF all the many marvelous and God-given privileges accorded to priests, one of the most glorious and sublime is that of standing up in the pulpit and preaching the Word of God. From whatever point of view we regard it, it is calculated to fill our hearts both with wonder and with gratitude. Whether we consider (1) the infinite majesty of God, from whom we receive our commission and our authority, or (2) the grandeur and immense importance of the message itself, and the tremendous and eternal interests that the acceptance or the rejection of our words involves, we must surely realize how greatly we have been favored, and how very closely we have become associated with our Divine Lord Himself in the work of man's salvation. Well may St. Paul say: "We are God's coadjutors" (I Cor., iii, 9). In preaching the

Gospel, we are the ambassadors of Christ, and present ourselves before the world in His name to treat of the affairs, to propagate the laws, and to uphold and defend the interests of His Kingdom. Or to express the same truth in the very words of the Apostle: "For Christ we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us" (II Cor., v. 20). The Council of Trent speaks yet more explicitly when it lays it down that "Dominus Noster Jesus Christus e terra ascendens ad cœlos, *sacerdotes suipsius vicarios reliquit*" (Sess. XIV, cap. 5).

Who can rightly estimate the immense responsibility resting on our weak shoulders? Who can measure the good or the harm done according to the spirit in which we carry out this pressing duty? At this very moment there are, without a doubt, thousands upon thousands of immortal souls, living in various parts of the world, whose salvation or damnation will depend upon the words uttered by priests in the pulpit. It may seem strange that God should have left mankind so dependent upon us for their salvation. Yet, so it is clearly stated in Holy Writ. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God," says St. Paul; but the same inspired authority also teaches that this essential "faith comes by hearing" (Rom., x. 17), and,

lastly, that in order to hear, some one must speak. For "how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom., x. 14.) Consequently, it would seem that vastly more depends upon this vital duty being adequately performed than we are apt at first glance to imagine.

God, who is the author both of nature and of grace, adopts very much the same system, whether He be dealing with our temporal life or our spiritual life. As, in the first case, we are left so dependent upon others that we should perish at birth, or very soon after, if there were no one to take an interest in us and to break the material bread of life for us, so in the supernatural order we should perish everlastingly, if there were no priests to administer the Sacraments to us, or to "break the spiritual bread of life" by instructions and exhortations. Hence those striking words of St. Paul: "It pleased God by the foolishness of our preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor., i. 21). If we weigh well these inspired words, we shall come to realize in some measure the immense importance of this duty, and shall do our level best to acquit ourselves of it as perfectly as possible.

Even without referring to the authority of Holy Writ, our own experience will assure us of the extraordinary power of earnest and con-

scientious preaching. In preaching, we sow the *word of God,* we scatter the divine seed. Beyond that, we have very little to do, for it is not we, but God Himself, who causes our words to fructify and to spring up unto life everlasting. But, if *we* do not plant and water, *God* will not "give the increase." Of himself, of course, the most eloquent preacher is nothing more than God's "coadjutor" (I Cor., iii. 9). "He that planteth is not anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (I Cor., iii. 7). But precisely because we preach the *word of God,* and not the word of man, the effect is not what we see, but far more than we can ever see. Who shall say how many saints have owed their initial conversion and ultimate holiness to some striking sermon, during which God spoke to their hearts? The renowned St. Augustine was so deeply affected by the discourses of St. Ambrose that he gave up his sinful life, and eventually reached heroic perfection. And, after listening to a fervent discourse based upon the words: "Possess neither gold nor silver nor staff nor scrip for your journey," St. Francis took the words as if spoken directly to himself, and, as soon as Mass was over, "threw away the poor fragment left him of this world's goods (i.e., his shoes, cloak, pilgrim

staff, and empty wallet), and made Poverty his 'Bride, surpassing fair.'" To these two instances many others might be added.

Or consider further the thousands upon thousands in every part of the world who have been turned from sin and moved to repentance by listening to the word of God, and the many millions who have been encouraged to persevere and avoid sin, to face the battle of life and fight bravely even against fearful odds, and to do God's bidding without counting the cost, by virtue of the marvelous graces that ever accompany those who lend a humble and a docile ear to a zealous preacher.

If we were to ascribe these and the like effects to our own weak and imperfect efforts, it would show that pride had blinded us indeed. But we know that we are simply ministers of God's blessings and graces, and that nothing is so powerful as the *word of God,* even though it be our sinful lips that utter it. St. Paul gave thanks to God because the Thessalonians listened to his preaching, and received his words, "not as the words of men, but (as it is indeed) the word of God, who worketh in those that have believed" (I Thess., ii. 13). So, in like manner, if only we enunciate the true doctrine as taught by the infallible Church, the faithful will receive

our words also, "not as the words of men, but as the *word of God,* who worketh in those that believe." And this is a truth to be always remembered by the preacher, as it is well calculated to fill even the most diffident with supernatural hope and courage. The *word of God* is indeed a most powerful and a most irresistible weapon, and, if wielded in a proper spirit, produces very far-reaching effects. Why may we reckon on this? Because St. Paul himself informs us that "the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching to the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb., iv. 12).

Ask any experienced missioner or retreat-giver, and he will tell of hardened sinners, and of men and women who had neglected their religion for even thirty and forty years, who have been touched and wholly converted by the power of the *word of God.* Their hearts may have been as hard as rocks, but they have yielded to the grace that comes with the hearing of God's words. How are we to explain this? God Himself gives us the solution, when He says: "Are not My words as a fire, saith the Lord; and as a hammer that breaketh the rocks

in pieces?" (Jer., xxiii. 29.) Once He chooses to exercise His power and to shower down His grace, no one can resist Him. And every earnest and holy priest may assuredly reckon on the divine assistance, provided that he humbly craves for it, and does what he can to deserve it.

These are merely some preliminary remarks. Now let us ask ourselves what we must do in order to preach really successfully and so as to do good.

When about to prepare our sermon, the first thing we have to do is to realize that our share in this work, as in nearly every other priestly function, is a very secondary, though still, no doubt, a very important one. Of ourselves we can do nothing. To use the Apostolic phrase, *we* merely "plant and water." It is God *alone* who "gives the increase." We must, therefore, pray most earnestly that God would make use of us to save and to sanctify the souls of those who come to hear us. I know a priest who will never deliver a sermon (unless he be called upon quite unawares), without first kneeling in fervent supplication before the tabernacle for quite a considerable time to implore God's blessing on his own feeble efforts. The consequence is, his words have often led to most unexpected

conversions and have produced marvelous fruit. "*Pray* for one another," says St. James, "that you may be saved," for the prayer of the just man "availeth much" (v. 16). Let us, then, never omit such intercession, when preparing to scatter the seed of the word of God.

The next most important thing is to stir ourselves up and to excite every faculty of our soul by pondering over the immense, and almost inconceivably great, importance of the task before us, for there is not the slightest doubt but that we do not at all realize the gravity of the case, nor the tremendous issues at stake. If we did, our preparation would be very different to what it is.

A famous actor—I am not quite sure, but, if my memory serves me, it was Sir Henry Irving—speaking of the difference between the Stage and the Pulpit, made this very striking remark: "The difference between a first-class actor and the average preacher is this: The preacher speaks of the most tremendous truths that can occupy the mind of man, just as though they were mere fictions of a vivid imagination, whereas the actor, in impressive language and burning accents, enforced by thrilling gestures, speaks to us with impassioned earnestness of mere fictions, just exactly as though they were

*tremendous realities,* and of the most vital importance. . . ." Surely, there is much justice in this judgment, severe though it be.

The truth is, we do not weigh at all accurately the full extent of our responsibilities or the pressing need of our warnings. Just contrast the condition of mind of a conscientious lawyer in one of our public law courts, who is defending a prisoner charged with murder or treason, with that of an ordinary priest in the pulpit of the parish church who is trying to save his parishioners from hell-fire and eternal damnation.

The lawyer will give his whole mind to a preparation of the case. He will most carefully weigh and sift every particle of evidence. He will not content himself with merely familiarizing himself with all the circumstances of the case, but will do his utmost to present them—not anyhow, but—*in the manner best calculated to impress the jury,* and to convince them of the innocence of the accused. He will appeal to them in every possible way, will endeavor by every principle of rhetoric to work upon their feelings and to arouse their compassion and their sympathy, and will take endless pains to secure a favorable verdict. In fact, we may truly say that, for the time being, he makes the

unhappy criminal's cause his own. He thinks of the fatal rope, just as though it were to be adjusted around his own neck, and is bent upon doing his utmost to prove his client innocent. In short, he is desperately in earnest and immensely interested, and throws his whole heart into his words, until the Court resounds with the vehemence and the passion of his appeal. The explanation is that he clearly grasps the situation. He not only knows—no, *he actually feels*—that it is a question of life or of death, and that a poor trembling fellow-creature *has entrusted to him the task of saving him from the gallows!*

Now, turn your attention to the average preacher. Although his responsibilities are incomparably greater, and his task of infinitely more lasting importance, yet he is far less conscious of this. In fact, he is quite unconcerned, and takes no pains at all commensurate with the purpose he has in view.

He may string a few thoughts together, and try to hold the attention of his flock while he utters some very calm and trite observations; but, as a rule, we shall discover little evidence of his attaching any very vital importance to what he is saying, so that his words produce scarcely any effect. In short, as Irving expresses

it, he speaks of the most sublime and eternal verities exactly as if he were narrating only fables and fairy tales.

In order to guard against this tendency, some direct and careful preparation is necessary. Before actually mounting the pulpit, the preacher should picture to himself the whole scene by an act of the imagination. In fancy, he should place himself in the pulpit. Before him, he sees a large congregation. As he watches them, he reflects that each individual now seated before him is a child of God, made to His own image and likeness, and is destined to live on for ever, either in heaven or hell, long after this world has moldered away; and further, that his words may help or may hinder them who are called upon to "choose life or death," since "that which *they choose,* they shall have." He will reflect that, among those whom he is about to address, some may be now struggling severely with temptation and may stand in great need of a little encouragement; others may even be in mortal sin and in urgent need of arousing to a sense of their most appalling position; others again may have grown cold and careless, and are, at this moment, running dreadful risks of lapsing into grievous sin, on the principle that "he who contemneth small things shall fall by

little and little" (Ecclus., xix. 1). Having weighed all these facts, the preacher should reflect that God is now going to speak to them through his human lips. Furthermore, he should animate himself with the thought that, if only he is in downright earnest and determined to do his part well, God will work, *through him,* the most magnificent and splendid spiritual miracles: (1) He will open the ears of those who have been long stone-deaf to all mere human persuasion, and give them hearing and understanding; (2) He will also restore sight to those who, till now, have been absolutely blind to the gravity of their offenses and to the excruciating torments that they have been bringing on themselves, and He will enable them to see; (3) He will do yet more: through the ministry of the preacher, He will even restore to the supernatural life of grace those who are now dead, and wound round and round by the winding-sheets of sin. Thus, the more the preacher reflects, the more conscious he becomes that he is dealing with issues of infinite importance and of immeasurably greater moment than the temporal life or death of the body, and that he is influencing, not the temporal and earthly interests of all who listen to his words, but their eternal and supernatural interests. Now, with

this strong conviction pressing upon him, he will surely experience no difficulty in persuading himself that he should spare himself no pains or trouble to render his glorious task as successful as possible.

Oh, how happy and grateful and proud should we be to have been granted such a share in the divine work of man's redemption, and to be allowed actually to coöperate with Christ Himself in promoting that sublime end for which He did not hesitate to come down from heaven, to become man and to suffer the ignominious death of the Cross!

Our misfortune is, that we do not understand the measureless value of the supernatural, and cannot appraise it at its true worth. A good sermon, full of the unction of the Holy Ghost, is bound to leave a beneficial impression upon every member of a large congregation. It will stiffen their will against temptation; it will render them more sensitive to their religious obligations; it will dispose them not to "harden their hearts in the day in which God will call upon them," and will, in a hundred ways, assist them to work out their salvation. Of this there can surely be no doubt. But, just for the sake of argument, let us suppose that a preacher has toiled and striven all the week in preparation

for his Sunday sermon, and that he has at last delivered it with all the persuasiveness and earnestness that he could command. And then let us suppose that God were to reveal to him that the entire and sole result of the sermon has been that just *one less venial sin has been committed in the parish* than would otherwise have been the case; in short, that the sum-total of the effects of his impressive words is to prevent one single venial fault in one single member of his congregation, who, but for his words, would have thus stained his individual soul.

Should he be disappointed? Discouraged? Distressed? Most certainly not. Let it be granted that he has hindered but one venial sin. Let me ask: Is that of little consequence? Is that nothing? Where is our faith! Oh, how blind we are when dealing with the things of God! If he realizes the enormity and the evil of even one venial sin, he should thank God and rejoice, and be almost beside himself with delight at having prevented the commission of even one small venial sin. For, putting mortal sin to one side, there is no evil so hateful to Almighty God or so hideous in itself as venial sin. By preventing a venial sin, the preacher has done far more than if he had prevented the plague and the ravages of the Black Death, and

the earthquakes of San Francisco and Japan, etc., etc. It will be enough to remind our readers of the startling words of Cardinal Newman, who does but express the undoubted infallible truth when he writes: "The Church holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions who are on it to die of starvation, *in extremest agony,* as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit *one single venial sin*" ("Anglican Difficulties," p. 199).

If, therefore, a sermon should have prevented sun and moon from dropping from heaven, and had rescued the entire millions now on earth from an appallingly painful death, we should certainly not say that the preacher's words were in vain. Yet we would be bound to admit that the prevention of a venial sin was the prevention of a far more terrible evil and an immeasurably worse catastrophe.

Therefore, even though we had done no more than diminish the number of venial offenses by one, in the eyes of God we have done much, and should be grateful and content; but there can be no doubt but that we do *far more* than

that when we preach fervently and with purity of intention, so we should rejoice with exceeding great joy, and esteem very highly our privilege as ambassadors of Christ.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PASTORAL OFFICE: HOW WE SHOULD PREACH

*"Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine"* (II Tim., iv. 2).

WE have spoken of the immense importance and of the marvelous power wielded by an apostolic priest in the pulpit, acting as the fully accredited ambassador of God Himself; now we propose making a few practical suggestions as to the preparation and the delivery of our sermons.

(1) There can be no doubt but that a young inexperienced priest should write his sermons in full, and should continue to do so for some years. Even when confidence and facility have been acquired, at least the headings and divisions should be jotted down on paper and carefully arranged. Then all the proofs and arguments should be set down in perfect order, much as is done when demonstrating a proposition in

geometry.[1] This is especially important in the case of those whose memory is not exceptionally retentive, for it relieves the memory of a great deal of work.

(2) Then the preacher should propose to himself in each discourse one definite and special point of doctrine, and *only one,* which he wishes to bring home to his hearers. Having decided upon it, all the rest of the sermon should lead up to that, should enforce its truth, illustrate its importance, and help to drive it into the minds of the people. To treat half a dozen different theses in one sermon, is in truth to try and preach half a dozen different sermons at the same time, and not only weakens the effect but leads to confusion. In order to satisfy ourselves that we have secured sound and convincing reasons for what we assert, it is useful to imagine a clever objector putting difficulties, and answer them by anticipation.

(3) Distinctness of enunciation and of utterance is, of course, of vital importance. For what will it avail to enunciate the most sublime

[1] Cardinal Newman writes: "I think that writing is a stimulant to the mental faculties, to the logical talent, to originality, to the power of illustration, to the arrangements of topics, second to none. Till a man begins to put down his thoughts about a subject on paper, he will not ascertain what he knows, and what he does not know, and still less will he be able to express what he does know" ("Idea of a University," p. 422).

truths, and to present the most irrefutable proofs, if we are not heard? Some speak as if their message concerned only those seated in the first two or three benches. Others have the exceedingly trying habit of speaking clearly enough until they come to the end of a sentence, and then dropping the voice at the most essential word. I well remember listening to a sermon delivered in what seemed to be a towering passion. Most of the words, I am sure, might have been heard in the street outside, but the *few important words* could be caught by no one, for the preacher dropped his voice as he reached them. The preacher wound up thus (the dots represent the words lowered dramatically, till they became *wholly inaudible*): "O my dear Brethren, if there be one duty more absolutely necessary than another, it is . . . (?) Whatever else you may do, will not save you from hell-fire if you neglect to . . . (?) This is not the teaching of the greatest saints and theologians only, but even of the inspired writers. St. Paul himself, in writing to . . . , declares in burning words that, unless you . . . , you will never, no *never* . . . (?)." Though all craned their necks and strained every nerve to hear the important announcement, it was all to no purpose.

(4) If we are to do good, another most important point is to render the sermon really practical and personal. Very often a preacher will occupy the whole of his time in setting forth in most elaborate and poetical language some scene from the Gospel, or some dramatic incident from the life of our Lord, or some important future event foretold by the Evangelist. Now, this (if well depicted) will no doubt charm and delight, or (as St. Paul says) will "tickle" the ears of the audience, but it is to be feared that but little good will accrue. In all such expositions, our aim should be, not merely to arouse and excite the attention of our hearers, but much more to give our words a really *practical application*. Perhaps my meaning may be best conveyed by an example. Let us then suppose that we are drawing a vivid and terrific picture of the Last Judgment. We follow St. Matthew, and describe "the Son of man coming in all His majesty and glory, then sitting on the seat of His majesty, surrounded by innumerable Angels, and with all the nations gathered together before Him" (xxv. 31-32). Then we draw the most harrowing picture of an unfortunate sinner now standing, trembling and ashamed, face to face with the Supreme Judge.

Now, what I want especially to observe is that at this stage most preachers will continue straight on to describe our Lord with an angry countenance, lifting up His voice and proclaiming the fatal sentence of eternal condemnation. But the preacher who wishes to make the occasion really personal and practical, is losing a golden opportunity if he does not pause: and then, instead of proceeding with the narrative, represent our Lord as doing what an earthly judge does before actually passing sentence. He should represent Him as asking the condemned man whether he has any excuse to allege, or any defense to proffer. This will give the preacher an opportunity to bring forward *all the common excuses* that the sinners in his parish make use of to excuse their neglect, and will enable him to show them how utterly frivolous and useless they are in the eyes of Him, who is to judge them on the last day. The Almighty Judge speaks: "Why is it that you have neglected My service and broken My law?"

*1st Excuse:* "I was careless; *I did not think.* Had I reflected, I would have acted differently, but I was thoughtless, and did not realize the vital importance of my earthly life, and of all that depended upon it."

*The Judge:* "You did not reflect! Was it

not your duty to reflect? Did I not create you an intelligent being, and furnish you with a mind? Was there any subject more worthy of your earnest thought than the salvation of your immortal soul? Besides, I warned you over and over again that 'with desolation is the whole world made desolate, *because there is no man, who considers* in his heart.' "

Finding this excuse of no avail, the preacher represents the culprit passing on to another.

*2nd Excuse: "I had no time.* I was too occupied with other things. I was in business. I had my shop, or my farm, or my trade to attend to. It absorbed all my waking hours, and left me no time."

*The Judge:* "What, no time! No time to attend to your immortal soul! No time to secure the one thing necessary! You had time to sin, but no time to repent! Time to break commandments, but no time to seek a reconciliation! Time to 'crucify unto yourself the Son of God,' but no time to confess your fault! Plenty of time to serve your evil appetites and to indulge your unruly passions, but no time to serve the God who created you! You found time to read the newspapers, and to go to the 'movies,' to the saloon, and the dancing halls, but no time to save your soul!"

Then the distraught soul, finding these excuses of no avail, will cry out:

*3rd Excuse:* "Do not be too hard upon me; do not condemn me, for after all I did only what I saw others doing. I am no worse than my neighbors. Indeed there were many others in my neighborhood much worse than I am. I merely followed the example set me by others. I merely followed the stream, etc."

*The Judge:* "Alas! Did I not especially warn you to keep on the narrow way? Did I not tell you, in the clearest words, that the broad road leads to destruction? How often have you not heard your pastor threaten you from the pulpit, quoting My words, and saying: 'How wide is the gate, and how broad is the road, that *leads to destruction,* and how many there are who go in thereat!' "

Finding these excuses of no avail, the preacher will represent the poor culprit casting about to find something else to say in his own defense.

*4th Excuse:* "Ah," he will cry, "it is true that I failed to do my duty, but I was so weak and temptation was so strong. The devil urged me so cunningly, and I had not the courage to deny myself what was put before me so artfully, and what seemed so attractive, so at last I fell."

Here again the preacher is given an opportunity of enforcing an important lesson.

*The Judge:* "Oh unhappy soul, did I not know your weakness, and provide against it? Did I not command you to 'watch and to pray'? Did I not promise to come to your assistance so soon as ever you should call upon Me? Yea, I did far more. I instituted the Sacraments to be a help to you. Now: tell me, how often did you avail yourself of them? If you neglected them and put off your confessions again and again, if you did not think it worth your while to seek strength and grace by approaching the Holy Table and nourishing your soul on 'the Bread of the strong,' who is to blame but yourself? Of yourself, of course, you are weak. *'Without Me you can do nothing.'* But had you shown any diligence in using the many means of grace that I, your God, had put within your reach, instead of now condemning you to the bottomless pit, I would be placing the crown of eternal glory upon your head."

As a drowning man will catch at a straw, the despairing soul will catch at any excuse, however foolish. Having exhausted all other excuses the sinner will lift up his hands in despair and exclaim:

*5th Excuse:* "It is true that I broke Thy

commandments, and neglected Thy service, but my life upon earth was an acknowledged success. I was a great man of business; I amassed a vast fortune; my name was good on the Exchange; I was looked up to and respected; I even built hospitals and founded public libraries, so that a grateful nation shows its appreciation of my many philanthropical deeds by the honor it is showering on my remains."

Then the Judge will refuse to listen any further to such vain excuses, and will merely answer: "'What doth it profit a man to have gained the whole world, and then to lose his own soul?' Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire; receive now the sentence which you have been asking for all your life, by your repeated sins and your continuous transgressions."

In some such way, we should endeavor to make our sermons practical and personal, so as to answer actual and present difficulties. But, besides being practical, we must also be sympathetic and fatherly, and that brings us to our fifth point.

(5) The preacher should manifest a strong affection and benevolence towards his flock. All should be made to realize the genuineness of his solicitude for their spiritual welfare and his strong desire for their salvation. As M. l'Abbé

Isidore Mullois says: "Make yourself beloved —be a father. Preach affectionately, and your words, instead of gliding over hearts hardened by pride, will pierce even to the dividing of the joints and marrow. . . . St. Francis of Sales converted 70,000 heretics by the sweetness of his charity, and not one by argument. . . . Love is the sap of the Gospel, the secret of attractive and effectual preaching—and the magic power of eloquence. . . . We are always eloquent, when we wish to save one whom we love; and we are always willingly listened to by those who love us" ("The Clergy and the Pulpit," translated by G. Badger). The famous Pascal is yet more emphatic. He writes: "It is God's design that truths of a religious nature should be received into the understanding through the heart, and not into the heart through the understanding. This is intended to humble the pride of reason, which is prone to set itself up as judge of all things. . . . Divine Wisdom teaches that we must love, in order to know spiritual things." He concludes: "The art of persuasion consists as much in conciliating the will as in convincing the judgment, for men are so much more moved by inclination than by reason" ("Works," II, 184 sq.). Cardinal Newman speaks in the same sense: "The heart is reached

through the imagination, by means of direct impression. . . . Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. . . . Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude."

(6) Another important point to remember is that, besides being simple, clear and intelligible so that the rustic and the laboring man may profit by it, the sermon should be short. Preach often—in fact, the oftener the better—but always be short, pithy, crisp and practical. The long drawn out and too elaborate sermons are very tedious and wearisome to listen to. Referring to such, Sydney Smith used to say that "some preachers seem to think that sin is to be taken out of men, as Eve was taken out of Adam, by first putting them to sleep." It is also related of one of the marquises of Normandy that, at the close of a service, he said to his chaplain: "There were some things, in the course of your sermon to-day, that I never heard before." The chaplain, feeling flattered, replied that he would be glad to know what points they were that struck his Lordship. "Yes," resumed the peer, "there were some things which, *in those relations,* I never heard before—I heard the clock strike *twice!*" The chaplain took the hint. Let us also take it.

(7) The last but by no means the least important point to remember is to pray earnestly that God may bless our feeble efforts and render them fruitful. Since the ends to be gained are essentially and of their very nature supernatural, we should make use of supernatural means to ensure success. Pray, first of all, in preparation, and pray still more after the sermon has been delivered that your words may sink deep into the hearts of the faithful, and that they may spring up unto life everlasting.

A story is told of a famous Jesuit preacher, who began to take pride in himself because of the marvelous fruits produced by his eloquence. He was in danger of losing his soul through his excessive conceit, until it was revealed to him that all the spiritual results of his words were *entirely* due to the fervent prayers of the saintly old lay-brother, who always accompanied him, and who knelt down praying behind the pulpit, while he harangued the multitude and *seemed* to be doing the work. This truth humbled his pride, and enabled him to save his soul.

*N.B.* As for the ordinary matter of our sermons, it is sufficient to say that it is all contained in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent.*[2] The late Cardinal Newman said that

[2] *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests,*

he "rarely preached a sermon without going to the beautiful and complete Catechism of the Council of Trent to get both his matter and his doctrine," and we shall be well advised to follow his example. But, in addition to the ordinary and everyday matter, there are just half a dozen subjects of great interest which are too rarely touched upon, and which are nevertheless of the very greatest practical importance, as it seems to me. I therefore venture to recommend them to the attention of the clergy, as I believe that they should not be omitted altogether. They are:

(a) The Holy Ghost, His gifts and His fruits;

(b) The immense value of grace and the means of acquiring it;

(c) Venial sin, its seriousness and its dangers;

(d) Perfect contrition, what it is, and what it does;

(e) The Catholic death-bed (we do not mean death itself, which is constantly preached upon, but rather the explanation of the purpose and the effects of Extreme Unction, the Holy

translated into English, with Notes and Sermon Program, by John A. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P.

Viaticum, holy water, indulgences, the Last Blessing, etc.);

(f) The eternal rewards of a life well spent, and the delights awaiting a faithful soul in Heaven.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PASTORAL OFFICE: CHILDREN

*"See that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of My Father, who is in heaven"* (Matt., xviii. 10).

A PRIEST on the mission has of course to deal with all sorts and conditions of men. But, of all his flock, perhaps the most interesting and delightful are the children. If the pastor be a true priest and a real "man of God," his influence will extend not to one class alone, but in a greater or lesser degree to all regardless of their position or character. A saintly example is the best and most stirring of exhortations, and its silent but powerful influence is ever making itself felt on young and old, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. This is proved by such instances as are to be found in the lives of St. Francis of Sales, the Curé of Ars, and all truly saintly characters. In fact, as has been frequently said, "good example is a continuous sermon."

But, if this be true of all, it is especially true of children. They are not only simple and trustful and innocent, but by far the most impressionable of all our flock. They are of an age that is easily taught. Their characters are as yet wholly unformed. They are still pliant, plastic, ductile, and easily led, and most sensitive to every external impression, so that their future depends largely upon the good or the evil direction under which they come. We priests must often have wondered as we poured the cleansing waters of Baptism over a newly-born child, and have speculated upon its probable future. It is indeed hard to prophesy how a child will ultimately turn out, or to imagine in what direction it will expand. How does it happen, we may well ask ourselves, that out of a dozen children, born in almost the same condition and perhaps in the same town and in the same year, one will develop into a St. Francis or a St. Ignatius, while another will become a Luther or a Cromwell? Although starting life, one might say, with equal chances, why does one becomes a Jezebel and another a St. Teresa—one a reprobate and another a saint? When we call to mind that every full-grown man and woman, even the foulest and the most impious characters in history, was once

upon a time good and innocent and full of the grace of holy Baptism, we are puzzled in our efforts to explain.

Probably more depends upon the home influence and the example of father and mother than upon any other single cause. But there can be no doubt that a kind, judicious and zealous pastor, who takes a genuine and fatherly interest in these young charges, will have *an immense deal to do with the fashioning and the shaping* of their future career. He should get to know them, and win their confidence and even their affection, and should let them feel that he takes an interest in them and in all that concerns them. A friendly greeting when he meets them in the street, a passing word of encouragement, a smile of recognition even, will receive an immediate response. And, what is more, he will often reach the hearts of the parents through their children. Parents are proud to see their children noticed, and are naturally drawn towards anyone who treats them kindly and with consideration. It creates a more genial feeling, and will often win over parents who for years have neglected their duties.

I well remember a little incident in illustration, which occurred in London during a big

mission. A little girl, of ten or eleven years of age, came to confession. Her father, who was one of those thoughtless and negligent Catholics too often to be met with in big towns, had not been to the Sacraments for years, so that the pastor was now inclined to regard his case as almost hopeless. But, at the end of her confession, the child paused for a moment, and then the following dialogue took place between the priest and his young penitent:

*Child:* Please, Father, Dad is coming to confession now.

*Priest:* I wish most fervently he were! But——

*C.:* Oh, but he is really. I have got him to come. After much coaxing, *I made him promise to come with me.* He is waiting outside, and will enter the box when I leave it.

*P.:* Oh, that's right. God bless you, my child.

*C.:* You will be kind to him, won't you, Father?

*P.:* Yes, yes, he has nothing to fear.

*C.:* Don't scold him, Father, *I promised him that you would not be cross!*

Under these conditions the hoary-headed old sinner came in and made an excellent confession, unburdened his conscience of a weight that was

oppressing it, and, once in the grace of God, thought more of his little daughter than he ever did before, because, under God, she had been the means of his conversion. I knew of another child, somewhat older and of such exceptional piety, zeal and tactfulness that, after having been received into the Church herself, she succeeded in bringing into the Church first her two sisters, then both her brothers, and then her mother, and finally after a year or more her father also. She then joined the Visitation Order in Belgium, and died there some years later in the odor of sanctity.

There is no doubt but that children often and almost unconsciously perform real apostolic work, and should be encouraged to help in their strange unstudied way to lead souls to God. Now, one of the most important duties of a pastor is to teach and instruct them in their religion and to prepare them for the Sacraments. This obligation is clearly laid down in the Decrees of the Council of Trent. In the Twenty-Fourth Session we read: "The Bishops shall take care that at least on the Lord's Days and other festivals, the children in every parish shall be carefully taught the rudiments of the Faith, and obedience towards God and their parents, by those whose duty it is (*i.e.*, the

pastors), and who shall be constrained thereunto by their Bishops—if need be, even by ecclesiastical censures." Once a priest has accepted the pastoral charge, he is bound *jure divino* to instruct the little ones of his parish in the rudiments of the Faith and in the principal mysteries of our holy religion. And this instruction must be extended and amplified still further *necessitate præcepti.* In short, we are obliged to communicate a complete knowledge of the Catholic Faith so soon as the children are capable of rightly understanding it; and, as this cannot be done by formal sermons to our people from the pulpit (which children cannot follow), it must be insured by catechetical instructions. Furthermore, the Church attaches such tremendous importance to the matter that she does not leave it to us to undertake this duty when and how we like, but specifies the time and manner of its performance. According to her law, we are obliged *sub gravi* to have catechism taught every Sunday and holyday throughout the year. Hence, too, the parents are to be gravely warned (decrees Pope Benedict XIV) of their obligation to see that their children attend these instructions: "We desire that the pastors shall with earnest and solid arguments show parents that they are in manifest danger of perpetual

damnation if they neglect to instruct their children in the elements of religion."

Children are careless, thoughtless and unable to realize, as they ought, the immense importance of being well-trained in their religion, and will often, no doubt, stop away from these catechetical instructions, unless they are carefully watched. The pastor should, therefore, make a point of seeing that all attend, should note the absentees and inquire the cause, and *let it be clearly understood* by his anxious inquiries how much importance he attaches to their presence. Some priests keep a list of all who attend, and reward with suitable prizes those who have been most regular. So long as the children can be persuaded to frequent the catechism classes regularly, the object we have most at heart is gained, so that we may safely leave details to each priest, who, if he is zealous, will devise the plan which he finds to be the most effective.

It is a mistake to suppose that to catechize children well and efficiently is an easy and simple matter, for many different qualities are needed on the part of the instructor which are not acquired without some trouble and effort. In the first place, he must have the art, not only of exciting, but also of keeping the attention of

the children, whose untrained minds are inclined to wander and to be distracted by the least thing. He should be able to enliven his discourse by apt and really illuminating examples. A good anecdote, some incident from the life of a saint, a story from the Bible, or even a made-up tale to fit the occasion, will do much to keep the little ones on the alert and full of interest. It must be confessed that to be a success as a catechizer is not given to all. One priest will keep a whole churchful alive and intent, and will make the half-hour's instruction a joy and a delight to the children and parents as well. His lucid examples, his homely illustrations which all will understand, and his amusing way of presenting typical cases as well as his bright and cheery manner, all contribute to make the weekly instruction a treat and a pleasure, and something to look forward to. Another priest, perhaps much more learned and quite as good, will not be able to maintain even order, or will succeed only in lulling his audience to sleep. Children will run willingly to listen to the first, but will not only feel no attraction towards the second, but will often exhibit an extraordinary ingenuity in excusing themselves from attendance. Hence, we should study the nature, disposition, and capacity of

those whom we have to deal with, so as to adapt ourselves to their needs and to get all the good possible out of them. Indeed, this is insisted on by the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (ed. McHugh-Callan, p. 7) in the following weighty words: "Age, capacity, manners and condition must be borne in mind, so that he who instructs may become all things to all men, in order that he may be able to gain all for Christ, prove himself a dutiful minister and steward, and, like a good and faithful servant, be found worthy to be placed by the Lord over many things."

Special need of yet *more careful instruction* arises when the children are being prepared for the Sacraments. Their first Confession, first Holy Communion, and Confirmation call for special treatment, in order that they may thoroughly understand (according to their capacity) the immense graces and benefits provided for them in these Sacraments, and that they may receive them in a worthy manner and be grateful to God for these most precious of all His gifts. Of course, it must not be forgotten that in these days our Holy Mother the Church invites her children to the heavenly Banquet of Holy Communion at an extremely tender age, and expects them to approach the altar-rail as often as pos-

sible. The practice of the Church since the time of Pius X has changed considerably, and, as by duty bound, we must strive always *"sentire cum ecclesia."* The Church is a living organization always with us, and *we have to listen to the living voice, and not be bound by the discipline of past centuries.* Now one of the present Decrees runs as follows: "Persons having the care of youths should strive with all their zeal to have them approach the Sacred Table frequently after their First Communion, and, if possible, even daily." This one quotation is enough to indicate the extent of the change of practice, and will lead us to the consideration of many other Decrees which inculcate a similar desire on the part of Popes Pius X, Benedict XV, and Pius XI.

Among our other duties towards the children of our parish is that of hearing their confessions. It is generally felt to be a tedious and a troublesome task, requiring an infinite patience, a gentle sympathetic manner, a painstaking interest, and unbounded willingness to help. There is, of course, nowhere where we are better able to direct, encourage, correct, and admonish than in this direct and personal contact with individual souls to which the Tribunal of Penance admits us. Whatever demand it may

make on our patience, we should thank God for having chosen us to a ministry where we may do so much, and really at very little cost, for His honor and glory and for the sanctification and spiritual advancement of the immortal souls for whom He died.

Then, there are our serving boys to be considered, who answer our Masses, assist us at Benediction, etc., and make themselves generally useful about the altar and in the sacristy. These are deserving of our earnest consideration, and should be taught to conduct themselves with reverence and recollection, and to understand the honor and privilege that they enjoy in being admitted into the sanctuary and sharing with the priest himself in the most sublime and glorious ceremonies of the altar. Here the priest's personal example will prove more effective than any words or exhortations. When the acolytes and other servers notice great reverence and profound respect on the part of the priests, the particular care they bestow upon all that concerns the public worship of God, and how careful they are to keep everything clean and bright and (in so far as is possible) worthy of their divine Master, who dwells in our midst in the Most Adorable Sacrament, the boys are sure to be impressed and will naturally try to conduct

themselves with a like recollection and veneration.

If a priest is watchful, he will often be able to detect the signs of a budding vocation in this or that habitual server. It often happens that this or that individual will not only be more regular and reliable in his attendance than others, but will evince a greater appreciation of the honor afforded him, and will exhibit a quiet interest and an unmistakable piety and devotion in his whole manner and bearing. It is well for us to be on the lookout for vocations. Many a zealous and valuable priest now on the mission began as an ordinary altar-boy. Many an excellent pastor, now doing splendid work and winning souls to God, began his ecclesiastical career as a devout boy serving on the altar, and there is no doubt but that there are many at this moment among our pious acolytes and Mass-servers who, given the opportunity, will one day, in the near future, receive the sacred unction and be numbered among the princes of God's people in the enjoyment of the priesthood, which, St. Ignatius Martyr reminds us, is the "apex of all good things which are found among men."

It is incumbent on us, at all events, to foster and encourage such aspirants and to extend to

them a helping hand, that, where the harvest is so great, the laborers may be multiplied and the sheaves gathered in. "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth laborers into His harvest" (Matt., ix. 37-38).

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE PRESENCE OF GOD

*"In Him we live and move and are"* (Acts, xvii. 28).

ANY priest who is really solicitous regarding his own sanctification, will value and try to avail himself of every help that he can think of, and will be most anxious to employ, not only one or some, but *every* means within his reach which may serve to further the end he has so much at heart. Now, one of these means (and an extremely important one) is to cultivate a habitual consciousness of the Presence of God. "Walk before Me, and be perfect," were the words addressed by God Himself to Abram (Gen., xvii. 1), and they are interpreted to mean: "Bear ever in mind the fact of My presence. For, the vivid sense of My nearness, and the habitual realization that I am an actual witness of all your thoughts, words and deeds, will cause you to restrain yourself from ever offending Me in any way, and will lead you on and on to perfection."

Though we have to exercise our imagination in order to bring and keep before us the thought of God's presence, let us reflect that we are not here imagining something purely fanciful and untrue, such, for instance, as a boy does, when to strengthen his good resolution he is told to imagine (what is not really the case) that his master or his father, or someone else whom he respects and fears, is watching him. In the case which we are now considering, we are asked to imagine only what is most certain and real, and what would remain equally true even though we never adverted to it at all.

To enter upon this practice in a profitable manner, it will be well to set clearly before us the teaching of the Church on the subject. She assures us that God is everywhere present, in *three* different ways. He is present, first, by His *knowledge;* secondly, by His *power;* and thirdly, by His *essence.* Let us consider each separately.

(1) *By His knowledge.*—Wherever I may be and whatever I may be doing, God sees me. His eyes are fixed upon me in all places and at all times. I live and act, as it were, under His direct gaze. Furthermore, His knowledge of me, every instant of my life, is most exact, most perfect, and most minute and far-reaching. No

thought, however transient, can arise in my mind but He knows it. No care or trouble or temptation or disappointment can approach me but He is aware of it, and knows its strength and violence and its effects upon my soul. In short, He knows me so thoroughly through and through that it would be absolutely impossible for Him to know me and all my thoughts, feelings and desires more perfectly and exhaustively, even were He to withdraw His attention from all other beings in order to rivet the whole of His attention on me alone.

(2) *By His power.*—He is with me also by His *power*. He not only created me in the first instance, but He supports my life from moment to moment. If I am alive at this moment, it is because He continually feeds the flame of my life, which, if He left it, would go out as a lighted jet of gas would go out if I turned off the supply. I continue only because He is with me, and sustaining me, and actually keeping me in being. If it were possible for God to forget me for one single instant and to relax His hold of me, I must that same instant cease to be, for no creature can exist independently of God. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts, xvii. 28).

(3) *By His essence.*—God is everywhere,

and therefore with me always by His *essence*. God cannot act at a distance, nor can He divide His Being so as to be partly in one place and partly in another. He is not only everywhere, and in every possible point of space, at one and the same time, but He is wholly and entirely everywhere. "If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. Then I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover (hide) me; and night shall be my light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and the night shall be as light as the day. The darkness thereof and the light thereof are alike to Thee" (Ps., cxxxviii. 8-12).

These are three tremendous truths of the deepest significance, and are deserving of our earnest and constant meditation, yet alas! they are recognized by scarcely anyone as fully as they should be. It is upon these three fundamental truths, as upon a solid basis, that the practice which we are recommending rests. To realize in the first place the infinite power and majesty of God, and to realize in the second place His astonishing and bewildering nearness

to us at all times in these three different ways, is undoubtedly one of the most powerful aids to recollection and to sanctity of life.

We might give many illustrations from Holy Scripture, but we will limit ourselves to one example of each sex. Let us take the feebler sex first. Let us recall what the inspired writer tells us of the chaste Susanna, the beautiful wife of Joakim. Two lustful old men, being smitten by her beauty, sought an opportunity of finding her alone that they might satisfy their lust. For this purpose they hid themselves in a large orchard, where there was a pond in which Susanna was accustomed to bathe. So soon as she was seen to dismiss her maids and to be quite alone, they came forward and ran to her and said: "Behold the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us, and we are in love with thee; wherefore consent to us." On the other hand, they threatened her, saying: "If thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee, that a young man was with thee" (Dan., xiii). Consider, for a moment, the terrible position of Susanna. She had to choose between offending God and risking the eternal loss of her soul, or face what seemed certain death and disgrace from the false accusations of these wicked men. "Susanna sighed, and said: 'I am straitened on

every side, for if I do this thing, it is death (of the soul) to me; and if I do not, I shall not escape your hands" (*i.e.*, death of the body). But, *realizing the presence of God*, she took courage and cried out, in a loud voice: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin *in the sight of the Lord*" (xiii. 23). Her vivid realization of God's presence so strengthened her will, and so filled her heart with courage, that she resolved to face a terrible and ignominious death, and to forfeit the excellent character she then enjoyed, and to go down to posterity as a bad and impure woman in the eyes of men, rather than commit sin *in the sight of the Lord!* By the contrivance of the two elders, she was actually condemned to be stoned to death, and would certainly have perished in that way, had not God sent Daniel to rescue her and to prove her innocence. Yet her vivid sense of God's nearness steeled her heart to face all this rather than to commit sin!

We will now consider the case of a man—namely, the great prophet Elias. By the command of God many formidable tasks were laid upon him that were extremely dangerous and difficult, and demanded much courage. But his lively consciousness of God's presence enabled him to face every danger. Thus, for example,

he was ordered by God to present himself before Achab, the wicked king of Israel, and to upbraid him for his many crimes. This was no easy task, for Achab was utterly unscrupulous, and might quite easily treat Elias as Herod later treated St. John the Baptist, and bid his servants cut off his head. But, emboldened by his consciousness of the presence of the infinitely powerful God, Elias did not hesitate to carry out God's command. Clad in rough sheepskin, and with no more formidable arm than his staff, he presented himself before the powerful and angry king, and delivered his message.

He feared not the anger of the king of Israel. Why? Because he knew and felt that he was standing in the presence of One before whom all the kings and sovereigns of the earth are but as the dust of His feet. With the *eyes of his body,* he saw Achab and his armed escort ready to execute his will. But, with *the eyes of his soul,* he saw a far more entrancing sight and a far more arresting vision; he saw the omnipotent, irresistible God, which so absorbed his attention that Achab's presence was unheeded and almost forgotten. Consequently, just as one nail drives out another, so the fear of God there present before him drove out of the Prophet's mind all fear of Achab. Elias said: "As the

Lord of hosts liveth, before whose face I stand, I will show myself unto him this day" (III Kings, xviii. 15).

Such examples might be indefinitely multiplied, but these two are sufficient to illustrate the wonderful effects of a vivid realization of God's presence. If only we can form a habit of seeing God ever before us, it will prove a marvelous help to us in times of temptation. When men fall into great sins and commit abominable crimes, it is always because they have ceased to pay any attention to the Divine Presence. They live without the thought of God, they treat Him as if He did not exist, and are not deterred even by the fear of One who, being out of sight, is also out of mind.

A story is told of a holy young man, who was one evening accosted by a profligate woman, and invited by her to commit sin. Now, in order to teach her a lesson and, if possible, win her from the error of her ways, he made as though he would be willing to consent, but *on one special condition*—on condition that she would lead him to some secret place, where no one could possibly see them. This she at once consented to do. Accordingly, she led him into a lonely cave in a sand-swept desert. On reaching the spot, she exclaimed: "Here, we are quite safe from

every eye." "Is there *no one,*" he demanded, "who can see us?" Again she assured him that their concealment was perfect. Then, turning upon her in earnest tones and gazing up to heaven, he said: "Knowest thou not that the eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts (Ecclus., xxiii. 28)? Are you unaware that 'the Lord beholdeth the ways of men, and considereth all his steps' (Prov., v. 21), and that 'the eyes of the Lord, in every place, behold the good and the evil, that is done'?" (Prov., xv. 3.) With these and such words culled from the inspired pages of Holy Writ, he little by little so aroused her dormant faith that after a time she was induced to give up her evil life. She repented, and never again dared to provoke the anger of God. For, whenever she was again tempted to commit this horrible sin, his solemn words would come ringing in her ears, and she would tremble at the bare thought of *the actual presence of God,* who, she felt, might take instant and appalling vengeance upon her, and perhaps fling her, without allowing any time for repentance, into the quenchless fires of hell.

If we would make progress in the practice

of God's presence, we cannot do better than follow the lead of St. Augustine, St. Teresa and St. Catherine. These saints loved nothing better than to represent to themselves the infinite Being of God, dwelling within their own hearts as in an earthly tabernacle. They liked to recall the inspired words of St. John: "If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and *We will make Our abode with him*" (John, xiv. 23). "Lay aside thy cares," exclaims St. Augustine, "and take leisure to think about God. Enter within the chamber of thine heart, and when thy doors are shut about thee, converse with thy Lord in secret." St. Teresa in somewhat different words gives the same counsel, saying: "Keep thyself enclosed within the little paradise of thine own soul, where He dwells who created both it and the entire world, and thou shalt drink abundantly of the Saviour's fountains, and in a short time thou shalt make great progress." And that St. Catherine was accustomed to follow the same practice, is clearly implied by her biographer, who writes: "St. Catherine of Siena looked upon her heart as an oratory, where, in spite of worldly hindrances, she could ever be apart with God, there to adore Him in spirit and in truth."

Indeed, the same in a greater or lesser measure was the practice of all the saints, and should be the practice likewise of all the clergy, who are expected to walk in their footsteps.

The vivid realization of God's presence within our own soul, with all His infinite perfections, not only will inspire us with the greatest courage when subject to temptation, and enable us to win many battles, but will naturally keep us recollected and develop within us the habit of almost continuous prayer. Indeed, it will be practically impossible for us to see God by faith within our own hearts without addressing Him and begging His divine assistance in all our difficulties and troubles. By degrees we shall form a regular habit of praying to Him, and invoking His grace and blessing; and we will feel ashamed to leave such a Guest for any length of time alone and neglected. Nicholas Herman, better known as Brother Lawrence, declares: "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and more delightful than that of a continual walk with God; those only can comprehend it who practise and experience it. Yet," he adds, "I do not advise you to do it from that motive, as it is not pleasure that we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from the motive of love, and because God

would have us so walk." After narrating his own experience, he continues: "Were I a preacher, I would preach above all other things the practice of the presence of God—were I a director, I would advise all the world to adopt it—so necessary do I think it and so easy."

This wonderful doctrine of God's continual presence in the very center of our soul is enough to fill us with admiration and with gratitude, and, the more we reflect upon it, the more cheered and delighted we shall become. God is ever with us, our one and only faithful friend, who will never fail or forsake us. From earthly friends we may indeed be separated, but from Him never. He is our strong and faithful Lover. He does not go down with the sun, but in the darkness is ever close to us, speaking to us in the watches of the night, that our sleep may be sanctified and made sweet by His secret presence. In the morning He stands by us, waiting for our confidences that He may share with us the burdens of the day. It is for us to excite our faith, and to grow more and more intimately conscious of the uninterrupted presence of our sovereign Lord and Master, and to make Him a real Companion and constant Consort, and the divine sharer of all our joys and sorrows, of all our trials and triumphs, of all our successes and failures.

In order to succeed in this most important practice, we must persevere manfully and resolutely in our endeavors. It will not be the work of one day. But, if only we continue to try to acquire the habit of seeing God within us, we shall undoubtedly succeed. Little by little it will grow upon us, and become more and more evident and manifest as the days go by, until at last we shall never forget that His loving gaze is constantly directed towards us, and that we are ever in His sight. When once our minds are filled with God, temptations will have no terror for us, suffering will become full of sweetness, and death itself will be but the clear and unveiled disclosure and glorious manifestation of One, whom we have loved and lived with, and made our Familiar all our life long.

Our first progress towards this state will be very difficult, for we are obliged to act purely and solely on faith. But, hard though it is, we know also that we can do all things with the grace of God, who never refuses those who ask Him for it earnestly. Knock—yea, be instant in knocking—and He will open to you in His own wise time, and grant you in a moment what He may have withheld during many years. Then your progress in virtue and perfections will be both rapid and secure.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

*"Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid, henceforth all nations shall call me blessed"* (Luke, i. 48).

WE cannot love God aright unless we love likewise His most Blessed Mother. And, if a tender devotion to her is rightly looked upon as an essential characteristic of every Catholic, it should certainly be a yet more conspicuous characteristic of every true priest. She occupies a unique position, not merely by reason of her absolute sinlessness and unapproachable sanctity—*"our tainted nature's solitary boast"* —but, above all, by reason of her being the divinely chosen Mother of God, who supplied Him with the Sacred Body, which was crucified for our redemption, and the Precious Blood, which He shed for the remission of our sins.

To her we owe more than tongue can express or thought conceive. If every good Catholic feels the most unwavering trust and the most solid confidence in her maternal care and pro-

tection, the priest should be even yet more permeated with these sentiments. Both on account of their character and on account of their work, she has an altogether special interest in priests beyond that which she has for any others. A priest is an *alter Christus,* and becomes, from the moment of his ordination, a subject very dear to her who is the *Mater Christi.* Nothing does she desire more than that the Faith should spread, and that souls should be saved for whom her divine Son died, and in the priest she finds one whose life is devoted to these ends. Like "another Christ," he "goes about doing good," preaching and teaching and forgiving sins in the name and in the person of Christ Himself; so that she, as it were, recognizes in him the likeness and the image of her own divine Son.

But our priesthood gives us a singular likeness to herself also, and seems to draw us nearer to her. For, as Jesus Christ became at a word incarnate in her womb, so does the same Jesus Christ become incarnate, as it were, in the hands of the priest each morning at Mass. As the Immaculate Virgin carried Him to "a city of Juda" in order to sanctify St. John the Baptist, so does the priest carry Him to the sick and the dying for the strengthening of their souls. Furthermore, as the Blessed Virgin watched over

and attended Him, so does the priest watch over and attend Him present on the altar; like her also, he presents Him to the adoration of the people at Benediction, and he lives night and day—as she did—under the same roof. In short, the relations that existed between Jesus Christ and Mary, His mother, while on earth, are more nearly reproduced in the case of the priest and His sacramental Lord than can be found anywhere else.

Our love of Mary rests upon the firmest and the securest of foundations, for it is founded on our love of God Himself. If we love God, we shall love all whom He loves, and, if He has shown a special preference for one over all others, we shall give that one a special preference also. For God loves, not by passion or whim, but according to desert. If He, the infinitely Wise, loves Mary above all others, it can be only because she is worthy to be loved beyond all others. "He who is mighty has done great things for her" (Luke, i. 49), and adorned her with a dignity and a beauty surpassing that of even the Cherubim and the Seraphim, as the learned Suarez teaches. According to St. Alphonsus, she *alone* has received graces which surpass the sum total of all the graces conferred upon *all men* throughout all time.

We should not only return our heartfelt thanks to God for having given us such a powerful advocate in Heaven, but, in all our trials, troubles, doubts and temptations, we should appeal to her with the utmost confidence, knowing that she is in very truth our Mother, and has for us all the tenderness, solicitude and love of the most perfect of mothers. "Behold thy mother" (John, xix. 27). Mary is more truly our mother than any earthly parent can be, inasmuch as the spiritual and the supernatural life is more than the mere corporal and natural life. Our earthly mother was undoubtedly the *instrument* by which God has given us our natural life. But Mary is the *instrument* by whom He has given us Himself, who is our spiritual life. "Ego sum resurrectio et vita" (John, xi. 25), and again: "Ego sum via et veritas et vita" (John, xiv).

The life of grace comes to us from God, but *through Mary,* just as the life of nature comes to us from God, but *through our earthly mother;* and as, in the *natural* order, God's use of our earthly mother to bestow on us the gift of natural life creates the most intimate and the tenderest relations between each child and his earthly mother, so, in the *supernatural* order, the use of Mary to bestow the gift of supernat-

ural life upon us creates the most intimate and the tenderest relations between us and the Blessed Virgin.

What profound reverence, what loving obedience, what boundless confidence we owe her as sons! And, reciprocally, what maternal solicitude and what watchful care we may expect and indeed reckon upon from her loving heart, as our Mother! It is said that, the more a mother suffers and the greater her anguish in childbirth, the more devoted she is to him for whom she endured so much. What then shall we say of the devotion of Mary, who became our Mother with indescribable anguish and heartfelt sorrow at the foot of the Cross, on which her Son was expiring?

When, at Holy Mass, we receive the Consecrated Species, we become united, incorporated, and in a sense identified with Jesus Christ, her Son; how exceedingly near, then, this must bring us into relationship with His Mother! This, indeed, is so true that some spiritual writers have contended that "the affinity and the tie which we have with her, even according to nature, exceeds all affinity among men."

None of us—least of all, priests, who have so much good to accomplish—can afford to ignore her splendid help. Her power with God

is simply measureless. "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you," is what our Lord says to *all of us,* even the most unworthy. If this be true of all who ask, how far truer it must be of the Blessed Virgin Mary! So again we may ask: "If God offered up His life for His enemies, and even for those who were putting Him to a cruel death, what will He not do for her who gave Him life, and bore Him in her womb for nine months?"

Though the bond between son and mother is always great, and is acknowledged to be the strongest and the most enduring of all human ties, yet we must remember that this bond was much stronger in the case of our Blessed Lady and Jesus Christ than among men in general. Not only was He her *only* child, but, He having no earthly father, her immaculate heart may be said to contain the love of both father and mother. Again, other children never have any voice in the choice of their parents, but Jesus Christ not only deliberately selected Mary from the whole human race, but fitted and prepared her for that unique position as only an infinitely powerful God could. Lastly, while other parents are led by concupiscence, Mary throughout was wholly exempt from even any admixture of such a motive.

Hence, we should look for and expect a much closer love between such a Mother and such a Son than is to be found anywhere else. Yet her power with her Son is in proportion to the extent of her love, and is therefore almost unlimited. "There is a power," writes Cardinal Newman, "which avails to alter and subdue this visible world, and to suspend and counteract its laws . . . and that is the power of prayer. . . . This is why the Blessed Virgin is called *Powerful*—nay, sometimes, *All-powerful*—because she has more than any one else, more than all Angels and Saints, this great, prevailing gift of prayer. No one has access to the Almighty as His Mother has; none has merit such as hers. Her Son will deny her nothing that she asks; and herein lies her power. While she defends the Church, neither height nor depth, neither men nor evil spirits, neither great monarchs nor craft of man, nor popular violence can avail to harm us; for human life is short, but Mary reigns above, a Queen, for ever" ("Meditations and Devotions," pp. 103-104).

Cosmas of Jerusalem has called the intercession of Mary not only powerful but omnipotent: *Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O! Maria.* And Richard of St. Laurence says much the same in different words: *Ab omnipotente Filio omnipo-*

*tens mater facta est.* In a word, the Son is omnipotent by nature, the Mother by grace, inasmuch as she obtains from God whatsoever she asks.

St. Alphonsus gives two reasons for this: *first,* because, of all creatures, Mary has been the most faithful and the greatest lover of God, so that Suarez declares that Christ loves Mary more than all the other Saints and all the Angels united. The *second* reason he gives is, that Mary is His Mother, so that her prayers partake of the nature of a command. Thus, St. Antonine says: *Oratio Disparæ habet rationem imperii, unde impossible est eam non exaudiri.*

Every true priest of God will love, venerate and honor Christ's Immaculate Mother, and do all he can to prove his affection and devotion. He will say her Rosary as regularly as his Office, and will never allow a day to pass without invoking her aid and protection. Her feasts too he will keep with special honor, and her sweet name will be often on his lips, and yet more frequently in his heart.

But, not content with paying her homage himself, he will make a point of urging his flock to recognize her exalted position and the immense value of her patronage. In sermon and instruction he will love to sound her praises and to

spread the knowledge of her power and her worth. In Protestant countries there is sometimes a lamentable tendency, even for priests, to tone down her unrivaled excellence, and to say nothing that may startle those who are not of the Faith. Preachers are afraid of shocking non-Catholics, and scarcely dare to publish fully and openly her great prerogatives. Father F. W. Faber referred to this, even in his day (1862). "Here in England," he observes, "Mary is not half enough preached. Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It is frightened out of its wits by the sneers of heresy. It is always invoking human respect and carnal prudence, wishing to make Mary so little of a Mary that Protestants may feel at ease about her. . . . Hence it is that Jesus is not loved, that heretics are not converted, that the Church is not exalted; that souls, which might be Saints, wither and dwindle; that the Sacraments are not rightfully frequented, or souls evangelized. Jesus is obscured *because Mary is kept in the background*" (cfr. Faber's *Preface* to De Montfort's "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin," p. xxiii).

No doubt the same charge may be made, at all events in some degree, in the United States and elsewhere, where Protestantism is rife. Can

we ever say too much in honor of our Blessed Lady? Or rather can we ever say enough? Provided we avow, with all the Church, that Mary is but a mere creature, come from the hands of God, and *in comparison with His Infinite Majesty* less than an atom (or rather nothing at all), we may safely publish her unique position, and point to her as the most splendid work of God and as the masterpiece of His hands—the first and foremost of His creatures. "He that is mighty hath done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke, i. 49).

Our Blessed Lady is often compared, on account of her chastity and her beauty, to the moon. Thus the words of the Canticle of Canticles: "Fair as the moon" (vii. 9), are quite commonly applied to her. And, just as the poets love to sing the praises of the material moon and are never weary of pointing out its loveliness, so do spiritual writers love to sound the praises of the Blessed Virgin. Shakespeare calls the moon "the queen of night" and "the governess of the floods." He says: "We are govern'd, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress, the moon," etc. Yet, as we all know, the moon shines solely with a borrowed light. Of itself, the moon is an extinct planet. It possesses no light or heat of its own. Its beautiful

silvery light is merely the reflection of the sun. It sheds a soft radiance and presents a charming appearance, but it owes all that makes it a thing of beauty to the fact that it receives on its surface the rays of the distant sun.

Surely, this is a beautiful image of the position that Mary holds in relation to Almighty God. She is exquisitely beautiful, but it is because she reflects the beauty of God Himself. She is the most perfect and the fairest of all creatures, but nothing of this splendor is innate, or of her own fashioning, but it is all the free gift of God. Of course, she had to correspond to His graces, just as we have to correspond to such graces as we receive. But no other creature has received, or will ever receive, such wholly unparalleled graces as were bestowed upon her. And no other creature will ever share her unapproachable loveliness or her unrivaled influence with her divine Son. "If you wish to comprehend the Mother," says a saint, "comprehend the Son; for she is the worthy Mother of God. *Hic taceat omnis lingua!* Here let every tongue be mute!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE REALIZATION OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

*"Who is a God like to Thee?"* (Mich., vii. 18.)

I AM going to make a statement which perhaps many of my clerical readers will at first glance feel inclined to question, but which I think they will be willing, on mature reflection, to accept as true. It is that the most sublime and important of all subjects that can possibly occupy the mind of a Christian, and above all of a priest, is just the one subject most neglected and disregarded: I mean the thought of God considered as God. Of course we are continually thinking and speaking of Christ, and Christ is God. But, even when our mind is occupied with Him, it is very seldom that the thought of His *divine* nature is the most prominent idea in our mind. In our prayers and religious exercises, it is His words, His miracles, His sufferings and His teaching that we dwell upon, rather than His divine attributes. We preach about the Sacraments which He founded, about the

Church which He established, and about His Blessed Mother and the saints, and so on, but rarely about His Divinity. We speak of heaven, of purgatory and of hell, of the joy of one day being united with Him, of the agony of separation, and so forth. But how often do we saturate our minds with the serious contemplation of His eternity, His infinite power, wisdom, sanctity and goodness? To vast numbers of the faithful Christ is very little more in practice than a man of exceptional and unapproachable beauty and majesty, but that is all. Of course it is so much easier to confine ourselves to the consideration of His human nature. We can all understand Jesus Christ the Man, but it requires a much greater effort to raise our thoughts to His infinite perfections, and to realize that, from every possible point of view, He is really infinitely beyond the reach of the highest flights of imagination. Although no human intellect can ever hope to fathom His unfathomable depths or to measure His measureless attributes, a patient and a persevering study will do an immense deal to widen at least our outlook, and to extend our grasp of His wonderful and uncreated nature. And the important point I am anxious to drive home is, that *every increase of this knowledge, however slight, will be*

*of the greatest service to us.* So true is this that spiritual writers assure us that whoever desires to make progress, and to reach the highest altitudes of perfection in this life, must *above all things* strive to understand, in so far as it is given to man, the unspeakable wonders and unapproachable prerogatives of that One, Eternal and Self-subsistent Being. This once secured, he will easily, and with the greatest joy, despise all the pleasures of the world, trample on the flesh, love justice, and observe all the commands and embrace all the counsels of perfection. For he will discover such limitless riches of virtue, beauty and splendor in God, and will feel such an overpowering atraction to the infinitely Beautiful, that nothing else will exercise any fascination over him, and he will readily cry out with the prophet: "For what have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire on earth? For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away" (Ps., lxxii. 25-26).

The following may be suggested as points in our meditations, for *each* of these twelve points, *if sedulously considered,* will be found pregnant with meaning, and will tell us something of the abysmal and altogether measureless depth that separates God from all that is not God. Let us consider these twelve contrasts:

(1) God is a necessary Being.

No other being is in the slightest degree necessary. God, who for a passed eternity existed infinitely happy and self-sufficing, might have remained equally happy and self-sufficing forever, without the need of creating any other being.

(2) God had no beginning. He always was just exactly as He is now.

All other beings had a beginning, and, when compared to Him, even the most ancient is but of yesterday.

(3) God is indebted to no other for His existence, but exists of Himself.

All other beings, without a single exception whatsoever, owe their very existence entirely to God.

(4) God continues His wonderful life, absolutely independently of others. He receives nothing from them, and He can be in no way helped by them.

All other beings depend wholly and entirely upon God, and in such an absolute way that not only their original inception is due to Him alone, but they are equally indebted to Him for each succeeding second as it passes. Even every act and thought of the creature demands the coöperation of the Creator.

(5) God can create countless worlds, without effort and by the utterance of a single word, and could utterly destroy every being that now exists, not by any *positive* act, but merely by withdrawing His support.

No creature, nor even all creatures combined, can either create or annihilate so much as a blade of grass, or a grain of sand.

(6) God is, at one and the same moment, everywhere and in all places, wholly and entirely.

Creatures are but in one place at any given moment.

(7) God knows all things, sees all things, actual and possible, at one and the same moment, and perfectly clearly, and without confusion.

All other beings are restricted and limited in their outlook, and know nothing of future and contingent, or of merely possible beings.

(8) God knows everything exhaustively, and nothing is hidden from Him. There is, in short, no mystery, nothing incomprehensible to His all-penetrating eye.

We, on the contrary, know nothing *exhaustively,* and are even to ourselves an unsoundable mystery. There are questions which might be asked concerning even a grain of sand, or a drop

of the morning dew, which no man living, however clever, could answer.

(9) Although the created universe is so vast, so varied, and so beautiful, and though it embraces so many different creatures, yet there is nothing whatever of beauty, of goodness, or of perfection in any one of them, taken singly, or in all taken together, which does not exist in God, and which is not to be found in Him in an infinitely greater and transcendent manner.

Whatever creatures possess is finite and limited, and but a feeble and unworthy reflection of what exists in God.

(10) Because God knew every creature before it existed, He was able to give it being. In short, *it exists because He knew it.*

We on the contrary, in so far as our knowledge extends, know creatures only because they exist. In short: (a) Did God not know them, they could not now exist; (b) but, did not they now exist, we could not know them.

(11) Supposing that every being in the entire universe, in heaven, on earth and in hell, were to forget God, it would not have the slightest effect upon His Being, nor make any difference to His essential happiness.

But, if (*per impossibile*) God were for one instant to forget His creatures, they would in-

stantly return to that state of original nothingness from which His omnipotence had drawn them. Not one, from the highest of the Seraphim down to the smallest mote floating in the sunbeam, would remain, since no being can be self-existing, except God alone.

(12) God controls every creature and rules over them, and has such complete dominion over every one of them, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission, nor is a dry leaf carried away by the wind, as we read in the Holy Scriptures (*e.g.*, Job, xiii. 25).

Creatures, on the other hand, have no control whatever over any person or thing, except in so far as God chooses to delegate it.

These dozen contrasts between God, on the one hand, and all who are not God on the other, though they might be multiplied many times over, will suffice to illustrate what I mean when I say that we do not think sufficiently, as a rule, of the tremendous majesty of Him, whom it is our privilege to serve. The more our knowledge of God grows, and the more vividly we realize His stupendous attributes and the unique and unapproachable splendor of His Being, the more we shall wonder and marvel at all He has done—at His becoming man and at

His agonizing death—and the more grateful we shall be for the magnificent gift of the priesthood, etc.

One priest, of course, *believes* precisely as another. All believe exactly the same doctrines. But to *believe* is one thing, and to *realize* is a totally different matter. There can be no doubt but that a priest who merely believes, and one who not only believes but who realizes and feels what he believes, are as different as can be imagined. They are like two different beings: one is *blind;* the other *sees*. The vivid sense of God's infinite majesty and irresistible power will lie upon the one like a deep flood, whereas the other is but dimly conscious of it. Hence, the one approaches the altar to offer up the divine Victim with a feeling of awe and with a profound sense of unworthiness, and will, as it were, see the myriad of angels and blessed spirits adoring their Eucharistic God, even while he holds Him in his unworthy hands.[1] But the other, alas! grown cold and thoughtless by custom, scarcely heeds what he holds. While the first rejoices

1 St. John Chrysostom speaks of one who "at the moment of consecration saw a great multitude of angels, as far as the eye could reach, clad in shining garments, surrounding the altar and bowing down, just as soldiers might be seen in presence of their king" ("On the Priesthood," p. 125). With the eyes of faith, we should see them too.

at his privileges, while his mind is deeply stirred with the intense realization of the marvels taking place, and while his heart overflows with wondering thankfulness and love, the other, though performing the self-same act, goes through it almost mechanically and with scarcely any emotion.

God is so infinitely raised above all other beings that we really require a special language with which to speak of Him. Even though (through the exigencies of language) we are obliged to use the same words, both when speaking of God and when speaking of creatures, we do not attach the same meaning to the same word. For instance, to say that a saint or an angel is good, means that he possesses the quality of goodness, which may be increased or diminished. In him, it is an attribute which he might or might not possess. But, strictly speaking, we cannot say God is good or possesses goodness. We can only say God *is* goodness. It is Himself; it is His essence. He is the eternal, uncreated, infinite goodness. We cannot even use the word "exist," in one and the same sense, of God and creatures. When we say, for example, that "the angels exist," we mean that they have been created, and that they are still supported in life by God's ever-watchful providence. But

when we say that "God exists," we mean something very different: we mean that He is self-existent, necessarily existent, and the only independent Being on whom all other existing things depend.

Another fact which helps us to understand His unique perfection is, that He cannot be compared to any other being. We may readily compare one creature with another—a mountain, for example, with a mole-hill, a glow-worm's tiny light with the sun, and so on—because there really is some camparison between them. But between God and the very sublimest of His creatures no real comparison is possible. There can be no degrees of difference, as the differences are literally infinite.

What throws still further light upon the infinite majesty of God are two facts which we are taught by the Church concerning the angels and saints in heaven. The first is that the presence of God, as their reward, always completely satisfies them. This is a power which belongs to God alone. A mere creature may satisfy for a time: it may fill the heart and the affections for a greater or a lesser period, but little by little its power weakens. How could it satisfy for a thousand, for a hundred thousand, for a million years? Whether the period be

long or short, at last a time comes when it can no longer satisfy and fill the soul, and bring joy to the heart. But God satisfies, and fills and overflows every mind and every heart that possesses Him in heaven for the whole of an endless eternity. The inspired Scriptures can express it only by saying that the just will be eternally "inebriated with the torrent of delights."

So much for the first fact. The second is, that God is so infinite in every perfection that even those who are always with Him, and who are able to contemplate Him without cessation both day and night, can never reach the bottomless abysses of His perfections, nor exhaust the endless splendors of His matchless Being. The powers of the soul are wonderfully increased in heaven, but, the higher our place there, the more clearly we shall see how absolutely unfathomable are the perfections of God. It is almost terrifying to think of the strong, piercing glance and lightning-like penetration of the minds of the angels, yet never have they fathomed—and never will they sound—the fathomless depths of God's infinite beauty and loveliness. They may indeed plunge deeper and ever deeper into that crystal sea of divine perfections, but they can never reach any limit. In

fact, the more exalted the angel or the saint, the more clearly and fully will he realize the incomprehensibility of God: just as a diver diving into a bottomless sea, the further he descends, the more will he perceive its unfathomableness.

There is no doubt whatsoever but that, the more we realize who God is, the more our religion will mean to us. Every dogma, and almost every religious exercise, will become more wonderful, more admirable, and more significant in proportion to our greater realization of the infinite majesty and unparalleled attributes and perfections of God.

Take two priests kneeling before the crib, and contemplating the Infant lying on the straw. How different will be the thoughts and feelings and emotions of the one whose mind and heart are saturated and penetrated through and through with the knowledge of the divine perfections, from the thoughts and feelings of the other, who has never occupied himself much about them! Or place them both prostrate before the Crucifix upon which the divine Victim is represented dying for love of us. Both no doubt will be moved, and deeply moved, but there will be a measureless difference between the feelings and sentiments, the wonder and the

gratitude of the one who realizes in all its truth the divinity of the crucified God-Man, and the other who, though he believes, does not realize all that it means.

Similar remarks may be made regarding the Holy Mass, Communion and the Real Presence on our altars. How totally different all these mysteries appear to the mind of the one and to the mind of the other! Or take the devotion to the Blessed Virgin and our confidence in her prayers. How differently we shall estimate her exalted dignity and worth according to the measure in which we have learned to know and to appreciate the infinite and matchless excellence of her divine Son!

Surely no thought should be so often in our minds as the thought of God. This thought should be allowed to remain and to sink ever deeper and deeper. The very highest and noblest occupation of which man is capable, is, we are told, "the absorption of his highest faculties on their highest object." If this be true, it follows that the occupation of our highest faculties (*viz.*, our mind and affections) upon their highest object (*viz.*, upon God) must be the highest occupation of which we are capable.

If ever we are admitted into Heaven, we shall learn that eternity is not long enough in

which to study and to contemplate the wonders of God's almighty Being. When we are so engaged, we shall know that we have reached the highwater-mark of happiness and perfection. If, then, the thought of God will be our only food and our all-in-all there for all eternity, surely it will be worth our while to make it our daily food even now in this land of exile. We certainly cannot afford to neglect such an important means of advancing in perfection.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE INFINITE BEAUTY OF GOD

*"He that walketh in justice . . . shall see the King in His beauty"* (Is., xxxiii. 15, 17).

IN the last chapter, we endeavored to show the immense importance of striving to realize the infinite majesty of God. We contended that, the more our minds are saturated with thoughts of the divine attributes, the better shall we appreciate the true import of the Incarnation, the Holy Mass, the Beatific Vision, and all other fundamental doctrines of our holy Faith. Let us now illustrate this by taking one of the divine attributes and seeing for ourselves how much its contemplation helps us to understand how infinitely God is raised above all His creatures, and how unspeakably more attractive He must be than all other beings united.

Our first consideration is that God is so exalted above all creatures that no saint or angel can ever sound the abysmal depths of His infinite perfections. Even in heaven, where the blessed receive altogether special powers and

where their minds are enlightened beyond measure by the light of glory, they are absolutely incapable of sounding the bottomless sea of divine perfections. In fact, as St. Thomas reminds us, the more exalted and the higher an angel or a saint is, the more clearly he will understand how utterly beyond all comprehension God is.

Consider that for thousands and thousands of years the mighty Cherubim and Seraphim have been contemplating the majesty of God day and night without interruption, ever discovering new beauties and fresh treasures and wonders, yet never able to reach any limit or boundary. For who can measure the Infinite? "To whatever heights the mind may scale, it will always be separated by an infinite distance from a clear knowledge of God" (Lessius).

Even the soul of Jesus Christ cannot know God adequately. His soul, being a created soul, is necessarily a finite soul, so that it cannot know the infinitely knowable with other than a finite knowledge. Consequently, just as the finite cannot contain the infinite, so (as we are taught in theology) the human soul of God cannot comprehend God. Just imagine then how infinitely short we are from comprehending Him, and how little we can understand His beauty!

Still, although we finite beings can never grasp the infinite, yet *we can go on gaining a better and a clearer knowledge of it* by persevering study and reflection; and every advance in the knowledge of God, however slight, is a very important step gained.

In the very first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul tells us that we are to discover the "invisible things of God" from a study of "the visible things" which He has made. Hence, if we desire to form some idea of God's unique position and infinite perfection, we must begin by contemplating the wondrous works of His hand, and rise step by step through the various objects that surround us until we reach up to the Creator Himself. "Noone can give what he does not possess" (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). God cannot bestow upon a creature any good or any perfection which He Himself does not possess.

The three divine perfections which are most easy to consider in this way, are also the three most important and the most fundamental, *viz.*, His power, His wisdom, and His goodness. They are written in bold characters right across the visible creation, so that "he that runs may read." But, as we are giving a specimen meditation on the divine attributes, it may be more

useful to select a somewhat more difficult perfection. Let us take His beauty: God is not only infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness, but He is also infinite *beauty*.

What a marvelous thing is even created beauty! How readily it attracts every eye! How speedily it gladdens every heart! How every one is drawn by it, and what thraldom it sometimes exercises over men's hearts! The extraordinary and inimitable attraction of beauty, which "draws us by a single hair," often seems and perhaps is absurd and disproportionate, but the attraction cannot be denied. All God's works are beautiful. All seem to bear about them the impress of His artistic hand, and beauty may be descried in every object that He has fashioned. Everything, in general and in particular, reflects His beauty. The far-stretching country, the deep and dark blue ocean, the whole expanse of sky, both by day and yet more by night, are ever sounding His praises, and proclaiming His power.

Look how the floor of Heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young ey'd Cherubims:
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

"There are," says Hamerton, "four new experiences for which no description ever adequately prepares us—*viz.*, the first sight of the sea, the first journey in the desert, the sight of flowing, molten lava, and a walk on a great glacier." All so different, yet all so beautiful! "To the attentive eye," writes Emerson, "each moment of the year has its own beauty: and in the same field it beholds every hour a picture that was never seen before, and shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their glory or gloom on the plains beneath." Thomas à Kempis may well argue that, "if the heart were right, then would every creature be a mirror of life, and a book of holy doctrine." May we not say in the words of the poet Gray?

> The meanest floweret of the vale,
> The simplest note that swells the gale,
> The common sun, the air, the skies,
> To him are opening paradise.

The same truth is told us in somewhat different terms by the inspired Word of God: "The heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge" (Ps., xviii. 2-4). "Thy works shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom,

and shall tell of Thy power" (Ps., cxliv. 10-11). In short, the visible universe all around us is but a vast open book in which we can all read much concerning the wonderful Being of God.

But beauty is everywhere. Even if we withdraw our gaze from the boundless sea and the arching heavens, and study the minutest flower or the most insignificant insect that crawls, we shall find the divine seal of beauty stamped upon it. Nay more, each tiny part, if carefully considered, will yield a perfect mine of grace, delicacy and beauty. The mere wing of a butterfly, or the mere pistil, or a single one of the ovules from the ovary of a flower, if examined under a powerful microscope, will be found a perfect work of art and beautiful to behold—the work of a consummate Artist.

Not only beasts, birds, insects, and every living thing on earth, in air and water will proclaim their indebtedness to the Creator by the perfection and the beauty of their being, but every variety of stone and metal and gem and jewel that men so value and prize will do likewise. Yet all this infinite variety of beauty, so rich and so exquisite, is gathered up in some transcendental manner, and exists without limitation in Him who gave them being.

Our task is to gather up, as it were, the in-

finite varied forms and manifestations of beauty that are found in creatures, and refer them to their origin. Beginning with the universe of inorganic matter, we pass through the endless different objects that exist, first in the vegetable kingdom, and then in the irrational animal kingdom, till we reach the rational creation: the kingdom of man. Just consider the choicest specimens of man and woman, in every age and in every degree of development, each possessing a beauty of its own. What examples are more distinct than the beauty of early childhood, the beauty of a fully-developed youth, and the beauty of old age? Yet each has a beauty of its own.

But, in the intelligent creature, there is a vastly more important and a much higher beauty to consider, namely, the beauty of heart and of mind. Reflect on the almost infinite variety of beautiful characters to be found amid the countless millions of our race, especially among the canonized saints, since the dawn of history. Yet we know, with absolute certainty, that we cannot possibly discover anything either attractive or alluring or fascinating in any one, which does not exist in an infinite degree in God Himself. If it be true—and there is no room to doubt it, as history shows—that the beauty of a single

human being can sometimes (at least for a time) fill and flood a man's soul with a delirious joy and turn earth into a paradise, what must be the effect of the beauty of One who contains within Himself the excellences and the attractions of all rational creatures united and then raised to the *nth* power?

From rational creatures, considered in the order of nature alone, we pass to rational creatures raised into the supernatural order of grace and glory. Let us remember that one single degree of supernatural grace lifts a soul on to an entirely higher plain, and places it at a bound an immeasurable distance above and beyond all purely natural states, whether human or angelic. All theologians agree that *one* single soul, enriched with supernatural grace, is made immeasurably richer and more ineffably beautiful than *all* actual or even possible creatures put together, that are devoid of such grace.

Pause, then, for a moment to consider: *first,* how a single soul in grace surpasses in beauty the sum-total of all the beauty distributed throughout all purely natural existences. Then, *secondly,* ascend in spirit into heaven, and call to mind the myriads of angelic spirits, each different yet each a veritable and perfectly distinct mine of beauty and loveliness in himself, for,

according to St. Thomas, each individual angel is a distinct species in himself. In the *third* place, consider how the nine choirs rise, one above the other, each composed of immense numbers, surpassing all computation, and each surpassing the choir beneath it in glory and splendor. Having done our best to realize all that that means, let us, in the *fourth* place, reflect that God in Himself alone possesses every virtue, every excellence, every grace, charm, splendor and attraction that is to be found distributed with amazing prodigality among them all, but with this sole difference, that in God every one of these innumerable perfections exist, (1) not in a finite but in an infinite degree, and (2) free from all imperfections and limitations!

But we may go a step further still. In addition to the countless myriads of blessed spirits now actually singing the praises of God, God could, did He so please, create others, even more glorious and more exquisite still. Now the beauty of these purely possible creatures likewise must necessarily be found in the One and Eternal God, otherwise indeed they would not be even "possible."

One concluding observation: so far we have been considering God inasmuch as He is imi-

table—that is to say, to the extent in which His perfections admit of being shared or reflected by creatures—and that is wonderful indeed. But we must never allow ourselves to forget that the essential characteristic of all God's attributes is infinitude. Now the infinite can never, never be adequately manifested or reflected, or in any way shadowed forth by creatures, who are by their very nature circumscribed and finite. Hence, in order to attain to this exclusively divine perfection, we must go straight to God Himself. To feast upon that, one must gaze directly into the unveiled countenance of the Eternal and the Uncreated.

Of created beauty we know something, though not very much; but who can describe uncreated and eternal beauty? We are able to form some notion of finite goodness, finite wisdom, finite gentleness and love, but none whatever of infinite goodness, infinite wisdom and infinite love. The difference is something entirely unlike the difference between great and greater, between more and less. It is a difference immeasurable and wholly inconceivable.

Between a tiny spark and the sun, there is indeed a vast difference, but, after all, it is a difference which may be measured, a difference of degree only: whereas the difference between

God and the noblest of His creatures is not one of degree, but of kind. Heaven, with all its countless hosts, and earth with all its inhabitants are so absolutely insignificant, when compared to God, that they are as though they were not (cfr. Is., xl. 17).

Every created beauty, wherever found, exists supereminently in the divine essence. For God is not only the *efficient* cause of every possible beauty, but also the *exemplary* cause and *pattern* of it. Since God contains virtually, in His divine essence, all conceivable beauties in supereminent measure, two consequences follow: first, created beauties are possible, and, second, God Himself is the supremely and most perfectly beautiful. In short, God's Beauty is (1) infinite, and (2) self-existent, and (3) is Himself. For we cannot say correctly that God *has* beauty, but rather that He *is* beauty, the eternal and uncreated and infinite beauty, of which all other beauties are but dim shadows.

The most sublime of all *created* beauties is that of a soul or spirit which has been raised to the supernatural order through sanctifying grace, through the habits and virtues which have been divinely infused into it, and through its participation in the divine nature. This is that beauty which will attain to its completeness only

through its final consummation in beatific glory. Though inconceivably lovely, yet all created beauties, whether taken singly or all together, are but feeble images in the dark, as compared to the beauty that is in God.

Hence it follows that God is infinitely desirable, attractive, and alluring. He has but to show Himself, and every beholder will feel the irresistible force of His attraction. He is a magnet drawing all to Himself with an infinite power. In heaven, where He actually manifests His beauty and perfections, the attraction is so great that all the saints and angels necessarily love Him, and cannot suspend or withhold their love. To quote the very words of Lessius, "He attracts us so powerfully that all of necessity love Him, nor can they in any way suspend or repress the action of their love."

We will conclude with the following short but beautiful prayer of the same saintly theologian: "O God, who hast created all things, Thou art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou art good, for they are good; Thou dost exist, for they exist. But they are neither so beautiful nor so good as Thou, nor do they exist as Thou, their Creator, existest; and in comparison with Thee they are neither beautiful nor good, nor do they exist" (*De nominibus Dei,* p. 267).

Surely, a priest who feels and realizes what has been so feebly said in the above pages, will say his *Domine, non sum dignus* at Mass in a very different manner from that of a priest who never bestows a thought on the attributes of God.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE INFINITE POWER OF GOD

*"O Lord, Lord, Almighty King, all things are in Thy power, and there is none that can resist Thy will"* (Esther, xiii. 9).

THERE can be no more profitable occupation either for priest or people than the study of the divine Nature and the marvelous attributes of God. We have it on the authority of St. John (xvii. 3), who speaks in inspired words, that "this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." And we are assured by Solomon (Wis., xv. 3) that "to know God is perfect justice: and to know His justice and His power is the root of immortality." For, as heat is generated by fire and as light is generated by the sun, so sanctity is generated by the mind saturated with the knowledge of God and of His divine perfections.

Further, if through the infinite mercy of God we be one day admitted into His unveiled Pres-

ence in heaven, the one supreme and only adequate source of our ecstatic happiness there will be the contemplating and gazing on His divine perfections. Should we not then, even while still pilgrims upon earth, begin to learn all we can concerning Him, the knowledge of whom is "eternal life"?

Perhaps the very first attribute of God to be descried by the inquiring mind will be His infinite Power, for this lies, as it were, on the very surface of the vast creation. We have but to cast our eyes around, and on every side we behold the material universe stretching away and away to untold distances. We wander out on a clear, cloudless night, and we are amazed to see the number and the brightness of the stars. And, as we gaze entranced by their excessive beauty, we reflect that what look like mere luminous points are, in sober truth, vast suns and immense worlds, in the midst of which our insignificant little earth floats about as a wandering mote.

Although we may detect many thousands of them with the naked eye, yet there are vastly larger numbers lying far beyond the reach of our unassisted vision. Then, we summon to our aid a modern telescope, and at once the whole scene changes. What we took to be great,

unoccupied inter-stellar spaces, void and empty, are found to be crowded with stars, galaxies, nebulæ, and other heavenly bodies. In fact, every advance in the power and perfection of the instrument reveals yet fresh denizens of the sky. What astronomers once took to be the very confines of the universe is now proved by observation to be nothing more than the confines of our limited vision! Greatly as our more recent instruments have extended the range of our vision, there can be no doubt but that each more powerful telescope still to be invented will bring within our view even yet more distant heavenly bodies. The famous Jesuit astronomer, Padre Secchi, was accustomed to say that, although the visible creation is not actually infinite (since no creature can be), yet *to us it is just as though it were*. For, though undoubtedly it has limits, yet we have never been able to discover any, and probably never shall.

But, if we wish to be impressed by the wonderful works of God, we must reflect not only on the immense number, but also on the colossal size of these heavenly orbs, which it is difficult to realize. The star with which we are best acquainted is our own sun. As the stars we see in the heavens are, in reality, suns, so the sun that warms our earth is but an ordinary star.

If it looks so different, that is because it is so very much nearer.

The sun is considerably more than a million times the bulk of the earth. But who realizes what that simple statement means? As the word "million" will recur again and again, and as so much will depend on our being able to form some idea of what a *million* signifies, we will pause here for a moment to speak of it. I asked a well-known priest on one occasion how long he thought it would take him to count one million. He paused for a moment to reflect, and then he answered: "Well, I guess it would take me half an hour." When I told him that it would take him more than ten full days and ten full nights, even though he continued without interruption, and allowed no time for food or sleep, he was very much astonished.

One may count the smaller numerals more quickly than at the rate of one per second (*e.g.*, 1, 2, 3, and so on), but, when we reach the higher numbers (such as 654,973, 654,974, 654,975, and so on), we would find it cannot be done at the rate of one numeral per second. But, even if we allow that a man could go on counting at the rate of one per second, he would not be able to count more than 864,000 (though he struggled on without missing a single second)

in ten whole days and nights; for, in ten days and nights, there are but 864,000 seconds. He would fall short of a million by 136,000. In short, so far from accomplishing his task in ten days and nights, he would have to go on for nearly two days more. Though this is a digression, I deem it a very important one, for we must appreciate the force of the terms used, or the argument will be lost upon us.

Having carefully considered what is meant by a million, we are now in a better position to understand what is meant by stating that the sun is over a million times (in fact, to be accurate, 1,300,000 times) larger than the earth.

Yet, as the same authorities tell us, our sun is in reality only an ordinary star, and much smaller than many of the other stars. It looks more imposing and, of course, it is everything to us, because it is the nearest star to us. Its distance is calculated to be 93,000,000 miles. Whereas the next "nearest star to us," writes E. W. Maunder, F.R.A.S., "is about 280,000 times as far from us as the sun. This is Alpha Centauri, the brightest star in the constellation of the Centaur." He then adds: "It is generally supposed that the mass of stars in the Milky Way are something like 300,000,000 times as far from us as we are from the sun"

(cfr. E. W. Page, "The Science of the Stars," p. 53). And, if our sun were placed among them and at a like distance, we should scarcely be able to see it at all.

The great Creator has placed the sun about 93,000,000 of miles from us, so that it warms us without scorching us, and bestows upon our earth a pleasant and yet a sufficiently varied climate. But let us suppose, just for the sake of argument, that our earth were placed within one hundred miles of the sun. What would be the consequence? We should instantly be reduced to ashes. But suppose, by some miracle, we were able to remain so near without being burnt up and incinerated, we should then be deafened by the roaring and the crackling of its tremendous fires, and blinded by the brilliancy of its colossal flames. But, once the earth were to approach so near to its great luminary, one of its gigantic tongues of flame would lick it up as a lion would lick up a drop of water. What I have called "tongues," astronomers call "prominences." They leap out of the chromosphere, as a tongue out of the mouth, *usually* to a distance of forty or fifty thousand miles, but *sometimes* to a distance of two or three hundred thousand miles, and could suck in our little earth, in spite of its vast oceans, and snow-clad

ranges of mountains, and thickly-populated continents, just as though it were a child swallowing up a cherry. Indeed, no child is a million times the bulk of a cherry, while the sun is 1,300,000 the bulk of the earth.

What a wonderful scene to contemplate! Well may we ask in bewildered astonishment: "How did this beautiful and immense universe come into being?"

The Holy Scriptures tell us, in simple words: "God spoke, and they were made: He commanded, and they were created." As a piece of ingenious machinery or a beautiful work of art speaks to us of the intelligence and power of man, so do the glorious star-spangled heavens speak to us of the infinite power of God. We are at present confined to this little grain of matter which we call the earth, so however much we may know of the beauties of its seas and forests, its hills and spreading plains, we know nothing of the far more beautiful contents of the countless orbs around us. Yet God Himself designed and conceived them all, and has adorned them with a splendor unknown to us now, but which may be revealed in another life.

Consider, further, that God has endowed each particle of matter with a wonderful property, which we call attraction or gravitation, in

virtue of which every single one of the countless heavenly bodies attracts and exercises a true influence over every other. This attraction, if not interfered with, would cause all these bodies to unite in one immense globe. But their individuality is maintained by reason of the fact that they are all in motion, and are, therefore, kept apart, each in its proper position, by what is called centrifugal force. But just consider the mind that can so balance the centrifugal and the centripetal (here gravitational) forces of millions of rapidly moving worlds, all moving freely in the ether filling all space, and that can so arrange their mutual action and reaction, as to produce the most absolute regularity and harmony and order throughout the infinite expanse of the heavens. "Great is our Lord, and great is His power: and of His wisdom there is no end. Who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names" (Ps., cxlvi. 4-5). Many of the stars are at such a distance from us that their motion is scarcely perceptible, so that they have come to be spoken of as "fixed" stars. But now it is known that there is no such thing as a star at rest. Every one, great or small, is in constant motion. No heavenly body can remain in repose for a single instant, and not one can ever return to the spot it previ-

ously occupied. For, as astronomers assure us, our whole sideral universe itself is moving together with its hundred million stars through the immensity of infinite space, so that the movements measured are relative and not absolute.

The stars not only move, but they fly along their prescribed paths with a velocity that startles the imagination. A shell fired by one of Krupp's most powerful guns is said to travel at the rate of 2,340 feet per second, yet this is slow when compared with some of the stars. The star known to astronomers as "No. 1830 Groombridge" passes through space at the rate of 1,000,000 feet per second, thus surpassing that of the shell, in the proportion of 457 to 1 (cfr. C. Flammarion, "Stars and Atoms," p. 159).

This stupendous velocity is approached more or less closely by all the stars, but this one example will suffice to enable us to form some idea, at least, of the rapidity of the flight of the suns or stars as a whole. Yet, in spite of their lightning-like pace, their movements are so perfectly timed and so faultlessly accurate that it is possible to foretell such events as the eclipse of the sun, the transit of Venus, the arrival of a comet, and so forth, to a nicety. In fact, on the strength of this foreknowledge, great expeditions are

fitted out to such distant places as the Tonga Islands, Alaska, Australia, or the Cape. The instruments are got ready, and then, at the very day and hour and minute foretold, the observer places his eye to the telescope, makes his observations, and records the results for the delight and instruction of future generations.

Who, retaining any belief in God, can contemplate this wondrous creation without emotion? Who, while gazing on the marvelous works of His hands, can fail to realize something of His exceptional power and wisdom? But, while lost in admiration at such a manifestation of God's power, we must remember not merely what He has made, but how He made it.

Between nothing and something, there stretches an infinite distance. To bridge over that abyss, an infinite power is needed. Theologians tell us that to create is such an exclusively divine power that no saint or angel can create even a grain of sand or a drop of water. It is so essentially an infinite power that God cannot even delegate it to another. Yet God Himself called into being the vast universe without effort or labor or trouble of any kind. A simple act of the will, and the thing was done. A mere command, and the immeasurable universe, with

all it contains, sprang into being. There was no delay. Time was not necessary. He merely spoke, and they were created. As the theologian Lessius so forcibly and yet so truly observes: "So inconceivable is God's omnipotence that it would be far easier for Him to create a thousand other worlds than it would be for us merely to pronounce the word 'world,' which costs us no effort" (*De Nominibus Dei*, p. 147).

While admitting that the sideral universe is a magnificent manifestation of the power of God, we must at the same time remember that it does not reflect His full omnipotence, for the existing creation does not exhaust His power. He might create another universe as much greater than the present one as the present one is greater than a grain of sand; and a third as much greater than the second as the second is than the first, and continue so on without limit.

His dread power is such that He can create not only all that the mind of man or angel can conceive (so long as it does not involve a self-contradiction), but, what is immeasurably more, *viz.*, all that His own infinite mind can conceive.

Reflect further (1) that, in creating creatures, He created every faculty, capacity, quality and endowment which they possess, and—what must strike us as yet more wonderful—that (2)

He has to sustain them all in being and watch over them from moment to moment, lest they should perish. For, to withdraw His support even for a moment, would mean their instant annihilation. As St. Augustine truly points out, each creature is quite as much indebted to God for each succeeding instant of its existence as it was for the first instant; and to continue in life is equivalent to a continuous creation. "The Lord is a mighty King, for all things are in His power, and there is none that can resist His will. He has made heaven and earth and all things that are under the cope of heaven. He is Lord of all, and there is none that can resist His majesty" (cfr. Esther, xiii. 9-11).

There are three special fruits to be drawn from the contemplation of God's infinite power. The first is a holy fear, which should keep us from sin. This was what holy David prayed for so earnestly, after his terrible falls: "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear!" And thus Christ warns the disciples, our predecessors, "not to fear them that kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul, but rather to fear Him only who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt., x. 28).

The second fruit is a profound reverence. When we bring to mind His absolute dominion

over us, and consider our nothingness in His sight, we shall be moved naturally to humble ourselves and to show Him every homage, veneration and respect.

The third fruit is, perhaps, of still greater importance, and that is trust and confidence in the divine protection. "In the fear of the Lord is confidence of strength" (Prov., xiv. 26). "No evils shall happen to him that feareth the Lord: but in temptation God will keep him, and deliver him from evils" (Ecclus., xxxiii. 1). "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life" (Prov., xiv. 27). "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord: he shall delight exceedingly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon the earth" (Ps., cxi. 1-2). Such are a few of the expressions to be met with in Holy Scripture; they clearly indicate the immense advantage of considerations which will fill our minds with a deep-seated dread and a wholesome fear of God, if we happen to be in sin, and then with the most boundless confidence and trust in Him, if only we are conscious of being in His friendship and free from all serious offense.

Surely, if our hearts do not reproach us, and if we have reason to believe that God loves us and regards us as His most dear children, the

thought of His supreme power and absolute dominion over all the works of His hands should inspire the most unbounded confidence. Well may we exclaim with holy David: "If armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear" (Ps., xxvi. 3). "The Lord is my rock, and my strength, and my saviour" (II Kings, xxii. 2). "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the deep and all the earth, and the things that are in them, shall be moved in His sight" (Ecclus., xvi. 18). "O Lord, O mighty King, all things are in Thy power, and there is none that can resist Thy will" (Esther, xiii. 9). "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps., xxvi. 1.) *Si Dominus mecum, quis contra me est?*

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE OMNISCIENCE OR INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD

*"All things are naked and open to His eyes"* (Heb., iv. 13).

ALTHOUGH we are accustomed to speak of the attributes of God, and to declare without hesitation that He possesses beauty, wisdom, omnipotence and the rest, yet we must bear in mind that, strictly speaking, this is by no means an accurate form of expression. God does not "possess" beauty; He "is" beauty. He is the eternal, uncreated, and infinite beauty. He does not "possess" omnipotence. No, He "is" omnipotence. Omnipotence is itself the Divine Essence, and so on for all the other so-called divine attributes. In God there is no real distinction between His divine perfections. His wisdom is really only another name for His justice, His justice but another name for His omnipotence, and so on for all the rest. God is infinitely simple, one, and indivisible, but *we, being finite and unable to comprehend the Na-*

*ture of God,* are compelled to make a distinction between the different effects of His action upon creatures, and to distinguish them by giving each a different name. Thus, it may be said that the absolutely one and simple act of God, when it is considered from different points of view, gives rise in our finite minds to a great variety of effects, which we designate by different names. Yet we must ever remember that God *is* that perfection which He is said by us to *have*.

It is not easy to find a really perfect illustration, but the following is the best we can think of. A ray of light falling from the sun upon the earth will produce a number of totally different effects, according to the nature of the object upon which it alights. These different effects are not caused by any difference whatever in the ray itself, but are wholly due to the various peculiarities of the different objects. The ray is ever the same. Yet, falling on ice, it softens and liquefies it, but, falling on moist mud, it hardens and dries it up—two, not only different, but opposite effects. So again, falling on a healthy eye, it gladdens and delights it, but, falling upon an inflamed and diseased eye, it distresses and pains it. Falling on a bunch of *real* violets growing in the garden, it preserves and even intensifies the beautiful violet color.

But, falling on an *artificial* bunch of violets sewn upon a lady's bonnet, it will bleach them and gradually absorb every particle of color. Just as all these and a vast number of other different effects are produced, while the ray itself remains constant and changeless, so the selfsame and ever changeless pure act of God, coming into contact with different conditions of beings, gives rise to a great variety of different results. If it fall upon a soul in mortal sin standing before the Judgment Seat, it means hell and eternal damnation. If it fall upon a soul in grace, it means heaven and eternal happiness. We may call the first effect "justice," and the second effect "mercy," but in God it is one and the selfsame act. So again, the same ray of divine light falling upon a sinner, *who is well disposed,* may soften and fill him with contrition, whereas, falling upon one *evilly disposed,* it may embitter and harden him, so that God says: "I will harden the heart of the Egyptians" (Exod., xiv. 17). We may call the first "mercy" and the second "severity," but there is in sober truth no distinction on the part of God, the Changeless and the Eternal. It is the selfsame and simple act, which will harden one soul and soften another, and which will send one to hell and another to heaven.

That a ray of sunlight is white and colorless, is true. Yet, as soon as it passes through a prism, it at once breaks up and gives us all the colors of the rainbow. In a somewhat analogous way (though no illustration is quite satisfactory), we may say that, though God is a single pure act, yet, so soon as this pure act passes from the Creator to the creature (without producing any shadow of change in God Himself), it will produce different effects, and men will find it convenient and helpful to confer different names upon these different effects. Hence we come to speak of justice, pity, patience, knowledge, etc., etc., according to the varying results of the selfsame and immutable act of God. Not until we reach heaven shall we be capable of seeing clearly how all these perfections are in reality one and the same, and how the *most perfect unity* can produce such beautiful and such *infinite variety*.

Of all God's attributes (as we must continue to call them), His wisdom or omniscience is one of the most magnificent, so we make no apology for asking the reader to spend a few minutes in considering it, in so far as our poor finite powers will permit.

God is omniscient; He knows all things. In the first place He knows Himself. No creature

knows or can know the infinite adequately; yet God is an object infinite in every respect: so we have to figure to ourselves first infinity on the part of the divine Mind *comprehending;* and secondly infinity on the part of the divine Object *comprehended.* The infinite God is alone capable of grasping in all its heights and depths the infinite contents of His own Being. "Wisdom" is defined by theologians as the knowledge of the truth—not any kind of knowledge; no, only such perfect knowledge as arises from a comprehension of first causes.

Man cannot attain to the knowledge of first causes. Even Haeckel writes: "We can never apprehend the first causes of any phenomena. The force of crystallization, the force of gravitation and of chemical affinity remain in themselves just as incomprehensible as do adaptation and inheritance" ("History of Creation," vol. VIII, I, p. 52).

But this highest form of knowledge exists preëminently in God, Who is Himself the supreme and first Cause of all that exists. Hence the perfect knowledge of Himself necessarily includes the most intimate and accurate knowledge of every creature that His hands have made. This seems to be sufficiently obvious.

Let us suppose that a man is exhibiting some

wonderful and complicated piece of machinery, such as a new kind of clock, sewing-machine, or typewriter. After examining the object with delight, we feel bewildered by the number and variety of the parts, and turn to the exhibitor, and ask: "Do you understand the object and purpose of all these different parts, and can you explain to us what special end this little wheel or that strangely shaped lever serves?" If he replied: "Explain? Explain? Why, I invented the machine; I designed all the parts; I put them all together"—surely such an answer would satisfy us that he well understood the machinery and every part of it, and was fully competent to explain it. Well, this may enable us to realize somewhat more clearly how God who has fashioned all things—from the giant star, Betelgeux,[1] in the constellation Orion, which is said to measure 273,000,000 miles in diameter, down to the invisible infusoria and rotifera whose universe is a rain drop—must possess the most perfect knowledge of each and every being throughout the whole length and breadth of the vast creation.

Furthermore, though a man may invent a clever piece of machinery, he does not invent

[1] Measured by Messrs. Pease and Anderson, at the Mt. Wilson Observatory in California, on December 13, 1920.

the metal out of which it is formed, so that he is related to it in a far inferior way to that in which God stands related to His works. God made the very substance out of which they are constructed. He invested these various substances with a hundred different properties, and knows exactly of what they are capable, and how they will act under different circumstances and conditions, so that the example of a mere human inventor is, at best, but a poor illustration. Yet, perhaps it will serve for want of a better. When further, we reflect that, having created, God does not abandon His creatures but abides with them so long as they exist—for "in Him we live and move and have our being" —it is clearly seen that He must retain a most exact knowledge of all that concerns them. This necessity is still further confirmed by the fact that God is not merely present wherever any being exists, but that He is, second by second, keeping it in being, and constantly and uninterruptedly maintaining its existence, as truly as the gasometer feeds incessantly the burning jet of gas that gives us light. If we cut off the supply for one instant, the light goes out. If God were to withdraw His support for one instant, the creature would cease to be.

With us it is impossible to attend to a multi-

tude of things at once. And, the vaster the number of objects claiming our attention, the less we are able to give to each. But that imperfection arises from our finite nature, and has and can have no place with an intelligence which is absolutely infinite. But God knows not only the present; He knows, with equal perfection and accuracy of detail, both the past and the future. And the explanation is a simple one, and arises from the fact that with God there is no past and no future. The past and the future are expressions we have to use on account of the relation of things to us, who are only just made, and who are too limited in our powers to be able, as it were, to stretch ourselves out so as to embrace both the past and the future. But God lives as truly in the past and in the future as in the present.

If God did not know the future, then His knowledge would be limited: it would be constantly added to as the various events of the future slowly unfolded themselves, and we could not then teach, as the Church certainly does, that God is omniscient, or infinite in knowledge. So we must hold, as of faith, that God knows all truths, present, past, and to come.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies of future events, yet God could never have re-

vealed the future to His Prophets, had He not seen all long before it took place. In Isaias we are told almost every detail of our Lord's Life, Passion and Death, hundreds of years before He was born. And Jeremias, Ezechiel, Daniel, as well as the twelve Minor Prophets also depict the future, just as though it were the present. Now all this would have been wholly impossible, unless God, who enlightened and inspired His Prophets, had Himself known very clearly what the womb of time was going to bring forth.

Our divine Lord, while on earth, also manifested repeatedly His knowledge of the future. He foretold His death and resurrection, and the destruction of the Temple and the overthrow of the Jewish State. He even foretold His betrayal, and pointed out the traitor. He also foretold the fall of Peter with all its circumstances, and proved again and again that the future was no more hidden from Him than the present.

When we call to mind the vastness of the creation, the inconceivable variety of its parts, and the complicated structure of even the tiniest little insect that crawls along the ground or dances in the sunbeam, we cannot but feel dumbfounded at a Mind that can embrace the whole

without effort or confusion. This earth is packed full of every species of plant, insect, bird and beast, and each specimen of this endless variety is worthy of our examination and study, for each has been designed by Almighty God, constructed with the most wonderful skill and dexterity, and put together so as to form a most harmonious and well-proportioned whole. Yet there is no organ or limb, no muscle or ligament, no joint or articulation, no vein or artery, in any one of these beautiful creatures, whose existence, and whose use or function, are unknown to God. If, indeed, our own minds were more open than they are to receive impressions from created things, how much even the most insignificant would tell us of the wisdom and the discernment of the Great Creator!

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies,
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but *if* I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.
> —(*Tennyson*)

Professor T. H. Huxley, the famous scientist, also makes a similar statement: "I weigh well my words when I assert that the man who should know the true history even of the bit of chalk which every carpenter carries about in

his breeches-pocket, though ignorant of all other history, is likely to have a truer and better conception of this wonderful universe, and of man's relation to it, than the most learned student who is deeply read in the records of humanity and ignorant of those of nature" ("On a Piece of Chalk," p. 176).

Life is found everywhere, and in the most astounding abundance and in infinite variety. Yet, wherever there is existence, God must be supporting: wherever there is life, God must be both giving and maintaining it. Wherever a creature is found, there too must God be, for no creature, not even a grain of sand, can enjoy an independent existence, or continue in being for a moment if deserted by God. But just think what that means, especially when we descend below the visible world to the microscopical worlds that are to be found all around us. Leuwenhoeck, quoted by Tyndall, estimates the population of a single drop of stagnant water at five hundred millions of inhabitants. And in other infusions prepared by himself, the number of infusoria amounted, without any doubt, to many times that number (*Archivio di Lett.*, p. 222). H. Spencer observes: "Another animalcule visible only under a high magnifying power is calculated to generate one hundred and

seventy billions in four days. . . . And these enormous powers of propagation are accompanied by a minuteness so extreme that of some species one drop of water would contain as many individuals as there are human beings on earth" ("Principles of Biology," II, p. 423). "Should all its offspring survive, a single Paramecium is said to be capable of producing, by fission, two hundred and sixty-eight millions in the course of a month."

Multiply these numbers by the number of drops of stagnant water in the universe, and then try and form some estimate of the mind that without the slightest effort, and without any shadow of confusion, can assist at each birth, provide for each new life, and watch over all with a discriminating providence. Yet such is the mind of the Infinite Creator.

But the study of God's infinite wisdom will be most profitable to us, if we consider it in relation to ourselves. If God's wisdom reaches down to the most insignificant and microscopical creature, whose universe is a raindrop, how much surer will it reach down to man, His rational creature, created to His own image and likeness! Well may the Holy Scripture warn the thoughtless sinner, who flatters himself that he may escape the all-seeing eye of God: "Say

not, I shall be hidden from God, and who shall remember me from on high? In such a multitude I shall not be known, for what is my soul in such an immense creation? Behold the heavens, and the heavens of heavens, the deep and all the earth, and the things that are in them, shall be moved in His sight" (Ecclus., xvi. 16-18). Only the foolish sinner asks himself: "Who seeth me? Darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me. Whom do I fear? The most High will not remember my sins. But he understandeth not that God's eye seeth all these things. . . . And he knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts. For all things were known to the Lord God before they were created; so also after they were perfected He beholdeth all things" (Ecclus., xxiii. 25-29).

We may all exclaim with as much truth as David: "Lord, Thou hast proved me, and known me; Thou hast known my sitting down and my rising up" (Ps., cxxxviii. 1-2). "Thou dost consider my ways, and number all my steps" (Job, xxxi. 4).

To make this doctrine practical and personal, we must consider God's wisdom, not so much

in its relation to universal truth, as in its relation to ourselves in particular. Not one Catholic in a thousand pays as much attention as he should to this most wonderful yet undeniable fact; yet it is calculated to exercise a marked effect upon all who constantly bear it in mind.

St. Paul tells us that God "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature invisible in His sight: but all things are naked and open to His eyes" (Heb., iv. 12-13). Hence each one of us may most truthfully say to himself: "I am living at this present moment under the very eyes of God. He sees every movement of my heart, every pulsation of my blood. He reads every passing thought, every desire, hope, fear, or aspiration of my soul. Nothing escapes His observation; nothing passes His notice. So perfect, so profound, and so exhaustive is His knowledge that theologians tell us that, even though God were to withdraw His gaze from every other creature in order to fix and rivet the whole of His mind upon me alone, He could not know me any more perfectly than He does now. He never for a single moment ceases to regard me. He never wearies of observing me. I am perpetually in His sight. I may not think of Him, but He is always thinking of me. I may lose consciousness in sleep, but He

neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps., cxx. 4), but watches and observes me at all times and in all places."

If we consider who God is and His absolute dominion and irresistible power, surely the intimate sense of His constant watchfulness should be a source of encouragement and of joy and satisfaction, when we are conscious of doing His will, and should fill us with a great fear of offending Him, when we are subjected to temptation. As His omniscience is a matter of faith, and therefore absolutely certain, the whole question resolves itself into a proper and a practical realization of the fact. Earnest thought, persevering meditation, and a sustained effort to retain the memory of this dogma, will most certainly at last prove successful, will lead to important and enduring results, and will ensure solid and lasting sanctity. A persevering effort is essential, because there is no external sign of God's presence, and, where there is nothing to awaken our memory, we too easily forget. "Out of sight, out of mind." But the fruits are so exceedingly great that they are worth our most earnest endeavor. Let us then apply ourselves to the task, and always remember that we are under observation and never alone.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### INFINITE GOODNESS AND INFINITE LOVE. I.

*"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, taking pity on thee"* (Jer., xxxi. 3).

ALMIGHTY God is infinite in goodness. He is at once both the principle and the end of all and every good, which outside Himself can exist only by participation, and with absolute dependence on the Goodness, which is Himself. We call God good also, because He is the fount and the inexhaustible source of all the good that is to be found in men and in angels, whether considered in the order of nature, of grace, or of glory. If indeed there be any goodness among the myriads of angelic spirits in heaven, it is but as a tiny drop overflowing from the bottomless ocean of goodness, which is God. If there be any goodness among the saints and the holy men upon earth, it is but as one feeble spark sent forth from that infinite Sun of Justice, which is God Himself. He, and He alone,

is the absolute and uncreated Goodness, without beginning or end, without limit or measure, and containing within Himself every conceivable and every inconceivable good.

One of the direct consequences and manifestations of God's goodness is to be found in the love which He bears His creatures, and this is a thought which will bring great joy and gladness to all who come to realize it.

Let us remember that it is a marked characteristic of all goodness, wherever found, to seek to pour itself upon others. Goodness is naturally and necessarily diffusive. Just as the sun cannot contain all its prodigious heat within itself, but must scatter it around in all directions, and impart warmth and comfort to a thousand worlds; or, just as it is impossible for the sun to be the brilliantly bright object which it is, without at the same time enlightening with its glorious beams every object that approaches even within millions of miles of it, so God, from the very fact that He is infinitely good in Himself, would belie His own nature, did He not show forth His goodness in His attitude towards others. History itself proves how His goodness induces Him to extend to countless other beings a charity and a generosity exceeding all bounds.

The act of creation in itself is the first *external* manifestation of God's love. He had existed from all eternity. And, being for an eternity alone, it might seem wonderful that He should ever pass from that solitary state to surround Himself with millions upon millions of living beings. Why this change? Being already infinitely happy and wanting for nothing, it could not be in order to add to His happiness. No number of creatures, however countless, however splendid, however exalted, could increase by a hair's breadth His supreme, absolute and essential content. No. Our existence is a result of His pure and wholly disinterested goodness and love. "Behold, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, *therefore* have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (Jer., xxxi. 3). Although He did not create us till now, yet throughout the whole of eternity, which He spent alone, He both knew us and loved us, and determined to give us existence. "Et hoc beneficium Deus nobis contulit modo singulari, nempe amore *æterno,* non citius Se quam nos amando: eoque *infinito,* videlicet eo ipso, quo Seipsum diligit: mereque *gratuito,* sine ulla indigentia propriove commodo" (Aloysius Bellecius, S.J., "Medulla asceseos," p. 101).[1]

[1] "And this boon God conferred on us in a remarkable

When we think of God's severity and of the quenchless flames of hell, or even of the sufferings to be endured in Purgatory as well as in "this vale of tears," there may be some danger of such painful images checking our enthusiasm; but we must never forget that, whatever the miseries that threaten us, we have brought them all upon ourselves. If we may express ourselves in human fashion, we would observe that neither pain nor sorrow, neither anguish of body nor stress of mind, formed any part whatsoever in God's original plan. He created both angels and men to enjoy, from the first, happiness and content and cloudless joy; and, as a matter of simple fact, neither angels nor men would ever have had the slightest acquaintance with suffering or any actual experience of its meaning, if they had but behaved themselves, and not deliberately rebelled against their infinite Benefactor.

Adam and Eve were created in innocence, and placed in a "garden of delights." Had they faithfully kept God's simple and exceedingly light command, they would have passed a short

manner: by loving us with an *eternal* love, a love coëval with that which He bears for Himself; by loving us with that same *infinite* love wherewith He regards His own perfections; and by loving us with a purely *gratuitous* love, unprompted by any motive of need or personal convenience."

period of perfectly innocent happiness in an exquisitely beautiful and bountiful earth, as yet uncursed by God (Gen., iii. 17), and then, without sickness or death, they would have been transferred to the more worthy delights of heaven. God's thoughts were ever thoughts of peace. He did not, and could not wish evil to any one, but only what is good and desirable and to His glory. If now there is suffering, and anguish, and torment and death, it is solely and exclusively what we have brought upon ourselves. Man, and man alone, is responsible for the ills he endures. God is all goodness; in fact, it is precisely *because of His goodness* that He is obliged to punish evil. He would not be Infinite Goodness, could He tolerate or be indifferent to sin.

It is solely by sin that we render ourselves incapable of enjoying God, and that we suffer from His goodness, to which we put ourselves in opposition. God is related to the soul, much as the sun is related to the eye. To a well-formed healthy eye, the sun is a delight. It enables the eye to exercise its powers. It opens out before it all the beauties of land, sea, and sky. It enables it to find its way about, to catch the expressions of love on the face of a friend, and much more. But if a man by abuse, or by

some imprudence, injures the eye, and makes it sore and inflamed, the selfsame beautiful sun will no longer be a joy and a delight to it, but just the reverse. The brighter and the more resplendent its rays, the greater and more agonizing the pain it will provoke in the inflamed eye. The injured eye turns away from the sun, and is in trouble till it can hide itself altogether from its bright and beautiful rays. Does the eye complain? Does it accuse the sun? Does it wish to change the day-star, and force it to extinguish its illuminating fires? That, at all events, is what the sinner does, in the spiritual order, when he complains of God punishing sin. God changes not. He is still Infinite Goodness. As such, He must necessarily be opposed to evil. God would not be good, if He remained indifferent. He would not be good, did He not hate sin. He would not be Infinite Goodness, did He not hate it with an infinite hatred. It would be a far easier task to change the character of the sun, so that its light and its heat (so beautiful in themselves) should become agreeable to the eye that is inflamed and diseased, than to change the infinite splendor and perfection of God, so that He should become agreeable to the soul steeped in sin. Light and darkness can never agree. "For

what participation hath Justice with injustice? Or what fellowship hath Light with darkness?" (II Cor., vi. 14.)

So long as sin remains, there can be no intercourse between the soul and God. And what is more, so far as the sinner himself is concerned, he is without help and without hope. His crime, being committed against an infinite Being, demands an infinite satisfaction, so that it cannot be fully and adequately atoned for by any finite creature. Such was the lamentable state in which the world found itself after the Fall. To use St. Augustine's expression, the whole human race was a "massa damnata."

Man had got himself into an inextricable plight. The father of the race had rebelled. All his children were under a curse, and there was none to deliver. All hope had departed. A Cimmerian darkness had settled down over the earth. Nothing but eternal damnation (separation from God) awaited the children of men. Before any reconciliation was possible, perfect justice demanded two things, which seemed however absolutely incompatible: first, since man was the offender, man must pay the ransom; second, since the offense was committed against an infinite Being, no finite ransom would suffice—the ransom must be of infinite value.

But, how could such conditions ever be realized? No man, or angel, or creature of any kind, however exalted, could ever by any possibility offer anything but a finite recompense, and yet an infinite one was required. God alone had the power to offer what was infinite. But, even if He were to offer it—which seemed wholly out of the question—the second condition would still remain unfulfilled; for the ransom would not have been paid by one of the guilty race, but by God.

Here we indeed seem to have reached an insurmountable impasse. Then, *mirabile dictu*, that which neither man nor angel would have dared to suggest, or would even have dreamed of or thought possible, actually took place. The infinite goodness of God, moved with divine compassion for our deplorable state and in an excess of love, actually undertook to cut the knot and to solve the apparently insoluble difficulty by determining to become man Himself.

Oh, wonder of wonders! Oh, marvel of marvels! Who could have imagined that the Eternal Son of God, the Second Divine Person of the adorable Trinity, would so demean Himself as to become man! Who could have conceived that He would "empty Himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil., i. 7), and sink

to the level of our nature to rescue us from the appalling effects of our own disobedience!

He, and He alone, could fulfill both conditions. Since He was God, He could offer an infinite satisfaction. And, on becoming man, He could then suffer as one of the delinquent race, and in that way secure pardon, remission, and forgiveness for every rebel who would truly repent of the sins which were dragging him down to hell.

But please observe that we are not contending that man *could not* have been saved in any other way, for the greatest of theologians agree that, had it so pleased God, He might have forgiven sinful man *without exacting the full penalty*. All we are asserting is, that the claims of rigorous justice could not have been *adequately* satisfied in any other way; and that, rather than that they should not be thus satisfied, God Himself "did not disdain the Virgin's womb," but "was made Flesh, and dwelt amongst us" (John, i. 14).

As Cardinal Newman truly writes: "We might have been pardoned without the humiliation of the Eternal Word: again, we might have been redeemed by one single drop of His Blood; but still, on earth He came, and a death He died, a death of inconceivable suffering;

and all this He did as a free offering. From beginning to the end it was, in the highest sense, a voluntary work; and this is what is so overpowering to the mind in the thought of it" ("Discourses to Mixed Congregations," 308).

God's love, like His goodness, is not to be measured. We cannot weigh it, as we weigh finite love. It is not like the love, strong and pure though it may be, which we sometimes meet with on earth, and which astonishes us by reason of its vehemence. No, it is a love that throws all other love into the shade. The love of God is infinite and unsoundable, and the most salient manifestations of it are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. For example, the Incarnation and the Crucifixion of the Second Divine Person present to us, as it were, two specimens of the "infinitude" of God's Love.

As Cardinal Newman so appositely observes: "Men confess that God is infinite, yet they start and object so soon as His infinitude comes into contact with their imagination and acts upon their reason. They cannot bear the fullness, the superabundance, the inexhaustible flowing forth and encompassing flood of the divine attributes. . . . When they discern aught of the unfathomable depth, the immensity of any single excellence or perfection of the Divine Nature,

His love, or His power, or His justice, they are at once offended, and turn away, and refuse to believe" (*ibid.*, 309).

It is the excessive and infinite force of His love that staggers and confounds us. Even though God had resolved to reinstate us in His favor and to restore to us our forfeited inheritance, He might have done so, and yet have employed a mediator less powerful than His Son. He might have accepted the *imperfect* satisfaction of some mere man. But He determined to do, not what was possible merely, but what was best. In this sense, and in this sense only, was the Incarnation necessary; for, if a true and full satisfaction was to be given, then nothing could accomplish this short of the Incarnation of an Infinite Being, though the actual Passion and Death of the Incarnate was not essential, as the *truly infinite price* would have been fully paid by the shedding of a single tear or the spilling of one drop of His Precious Blood. "God so loved the world," writes St. John (iii. 16-17), "as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved by Him."

To realize the extent and the measureless depth of His love for His heavenly Father and for us, His fallen creatures, we must think rather of His divinity than of His humanity. "It is the very idea that He is God, which gives a meaning to His sufferings: what to me is a man and nothing more, in agony, or scourged, or crucified? There are many holy martyrs, and their torments were terrible. But here I see One dropping blood, gashed by the thong, and stretched upon the cross, and *He is God!* It is no tale of human woe. It is the record of the Passion of the great Creator. The Word and Wisdom of the Father, who dwelt in His bosom in bliss ineffable from all eternity, whose very smile has shed radiance and grace over the whole creation, whose traces I see in the starry heavens, and on the green earth—this glorious living God, it is He who looks at me so piteously, so tenderly from the Cross. He seems to say: I cannot move, though I am omnipotent, for sin has bound Me here! . . . I am come indeed, but not in that brightness in which I went forth to create the morning stars, and to fill the sons of God with melody, but in deformity and in shame, in sighs and tears, with the blood upon My cheeks, and My limbs laid bare and rent" (Newman, *op. cit.*, 321).

Perhaps the most marvelous thing about the sufferings of Christ is their exuberance. There were no lengths to which He was not prepared to go. He willingly and deliberately gave Himself up to suffer without measure and without limit. Although a single blow of the scourge would have been more than enough to atone for the sins of a thousand worlds, yet He would endure the scourging till His whole Body was but one ghastly wound from head to foot; though the shedding of a single drop of His precious Blood would have sufficed to ransom every soul ever to be created, yet He resolved to shed every particle of it and to be drained of the very last drop; although the slightest insult offered up to His heavenly Father in expiation for sin would have been more than enough to cancel the sins of all men, yet He would subject Himself to a veritable sea of insult and humiliation. In an excess of love without parallel, He willed to be harshly struck, crowned with sharp thorns, mocked, and even spat upon. And, although He might have redeemed us and offered a full and an infinite satisfaction without consenting to die, yet so boundless and superabundant was His inconceivable love that He not only consented to lose His life, but chose the most cruel, agonizing and ignominious of

deaths. His most perfect Body, miraculously wrought in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin by the power of the Holy Ghost and therefore intensely sensitive to pain and suffering, He cheerfully delivered up to the torturers. Through quivering hands and feet the rough iron nails were mercilessly driven, and the all-holy and infinite God at last died in anguish after three hours of excruciating agony and desolation.

"Why," we may well ask in wonder, "why should Christ choose to suffer such unnecessary pains? Why so insatiable of suffering? Why did He permit such cruel treatment to come upon Him?" It was His love that urged Him on. It was His tender affection for us, His fallen creatures, that made him wish to show the vehemence of His love, and to prove to us that there is nothing He would not do in order to secure our salvation. It is the sign and indication of a generous nature to do more than is asked or required, and far more than can reasonably be expected. This characteristic was, no doubt, in the mind of our Blessed Lord, when He said: "If one strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if a man take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go

with him other two" (Matt., v. 39-41). And this characteristic was exemplified in His Passion and Death. "He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way" (Ps., xviii. 6). He would prove to us in His own person that "many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it," and that, even "should one give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing" (Cant. of Cant., viii. 7).[2]

Well may St. Paul, in an ecstasy of wonder and gratitude and love, exclaim at the contemplation of so much generosity: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ. Shall tribulation or distress? or famine or nakedness? or danger, or persecution, or the sword? . . . I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor might nor height, nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Rom., viii. 35-39).

[2] "Speaking to St. Bridget, our Lord said: 'I who have created thee, have subjected every member of My body and all the powers of My soul to suffering and to punishment for thy sake.' . . . Especially He said (referring to the damned) that 'He would willingly have endured His passion and death over and over again, had it been possible, for the salvation of *each one* that was lost'" (Cardinal Vaughan, "The Young Priest," 291).

## CHAPTER XXXII

### INFINITE GOODNESS AND INFINITE LOVE. II.

*"He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is charity"* (I John, iv. 8).

NO created mind can ever form an adequate idea of any of God's attributes, for they are all infinite. Even the Saints have failed to realize the extent of His goodness and the boundlessness of His charity. Yet, so long as life lasts, we may be continually increasing our knowledge and gaining a more worthy estimate of the divine perfections, provided that we take the trouble to exercise our faculties and to reflect upon the great truths of faith that manifest and indicate them.

Above all things we should familiarize ourselves with doctrines which show forth and prove God's love. And why? Well, because it is the very nature of love to excite love. We are naturally led to love those who love us. And, the more fully we realize the greatness—we might almost say (if we may do so without

disrespect) the *extravagance*—of God's love of us, the more ardently shall we be stirred to love God in return.

No words are strong enough to express the immense importance of any increase in our love of God. Let us never forget that love is the very *measure of perfection.* Our position in heaven, if ever we are fortunate enough to get there, will be determined, not by the severity of our mortifications, nor by the length of our prayers, nor by the extent of our alms, nor by any thing else but by the degree of our love of God. Whosoever loved God most on earth, will have the highest place in heaven for all eternity. The lowest place will be assigned to the soul who loved God least. Those who loved Him not at all, will of course find no place for themselves in God's glorious kingdom.

How truly and yet how simply the holy hermit, R. Rolle of Hampole (*Incendium Amoris,* 194), speaks when he declares: "Non enim qui magna et multa agit magnus est, sed qui multum diligit Christum, hic magnus est et Dei dilectus. . . . Quia non facientibus sed diligentibus Deum est abundantia celestis coronæ."[1]

[1] "For not he who does many mighty deeds is great, but whoso loves Christ much is great and beloved by God. . . . Since not for those who do, but for those who love God, awaits an abundant celestial crown."

Bishop Ullathorne ("Ecclesiastical Discourses," 117) makes a similar statement: "The perfection of sanctity is measured by the degree of charity." All spiritual writers teach the same truth. Thus, Dr. Challoner ("Meditation on the Assumption of Our Lady," 536), makes the following observation: "What brought this ever-blessed Virgin to this supereminent glory? . . . It was principally her supereminent love, for the degree of the enjoyment of God in His eternal glory is ever proportioned to the degree of our love of God in this mortal life." If the reader prefers to hear a great theologian, let him listen to the following: "Omnis christianæ vitæ perfectio secundum charitatem attendenda est . . . Secundum charitatem attenditur simpliciter perfectio christianæ vitæ, sed secundum alias virtutes secundum quid" (St. Thomas, II-II, Q. 184, art. 1).[2] We might cite many other authorities, but let us end by a quotation from the great Saint, Albertus Magnus (*De adhærendo Deo,* 43-44): "Noone can attain to the highest happiness, unless he be inspired by love and yearning. For *love is the very life of the soul,* its nuptial garb and perfection, on which all the law and the prophets

[1] "All Christian perfection is to be attained through charity. . . . It is attained through charity essentially, and through other virtues secondarily."

and our Lord's commands depend. Hence the Apostle declares to the Romans (xiii. 10): 'Love is the fulfilling of the law'; and in his First Epistle to Timothy (i. 5): 'The end of the commandment is charity.' "

The paramount importance of increasing our love of God, since love is the very measure of perfection, will undoubtedly move us to make use of the means. Now, one of the greatest and most obvious is to dwell lovingly and steadfastly on the wonderful way in which God manifests His love for us. The more vividly we realize both the value and the number of His benefits, the more strongly shall we be filled with feelings of gratitude and love. One of the most stupendous and wondrous manifestations of God's boundless love—far transcending anything that the most exuberant fancy could have imagined—is found in the institution of the Blessed Sacrament.

Custom and familiarity have done so much to dull and deaden our appreciation of this unparalleled act of divine condescension (as they do of all else), that we do not esteem it at all as we should.

If we had lived in darkness all our lives long and had never known any more brilliant light than that of the stars, how stirred and startled

we should be, how beside ourselves, and how overflowing with amazement and admiration, if one morning the sun were to rise suddenly *for the first time* in all its matchless glory, to flood the earth with its dazzling light, and to reveal to our bewildered gaze the beauties of land, and sea, and sky! But, because it does this every day and rises every morning without fail, we think nothing of it, and take it all as a matter of course.

Similarly if, but once in a hundred years or even but once in each man's lifetime, God undertook to give us His Sacred Body to eat and His Precious Blood to drink, how much more highly should we prize the gift and how much more moved we should be!

If we may speak in a human way, it would seem that God's love of us is so intense that He had to solve a difficulty. It was decreed that we were to be put upon our trial, and not enter into the joys of heaven at once, but to qualify ourselves for them first. Yet He wished to be closely united with us, and to be our intimate companion *without delay*. So He devises a plan whereby He may accomplish this, while still leaving us without the actual enjoyment of heaven. In a word, by Holy Communion, He really gives us heaven at once, but in such a

way as not to interfere with our state of trial. In Holy Communion, we may truly be said to possess heaven without perceiving it—or, at all events, without sensibly enjoying it. For, what in sober truth is the difference between heaven, on the one hand, and Holy Communion, on the other? Heaven is nothing more essentially than the presence and possession of God, and in Holy Communion God verily gives Himself to the soul of the devout communicant—Body, Soul and Divinity. The one and only difference is that in the one case God comes in a hidden and invisible manner, whereas in the other He comes openly and manifestly, so that the soul can actually gaze upon His infinite Beauty, and become entranced and overjoyed by realizing what it is that it possesses. It is a wonderful, yet an undeniable fact that we have in Holy Communion absolutely everything that constitutes the essential joy of heaven. We have closely united with us the Divinity or God Himself—Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the adorable Soul of the God-Man and His glorified Body—not once or twice during our earthly pilgrimage, but day by day so long as life lasts.

These daily visits of the Eternal and Infinite God to every soul that likes to avail itself of the opportunities at its disposal, are one of the

most marvelous and most sublime tokens of love that God could give us. Could there be a greater?

It is not merely the frequency, but perhaps still more the astonishing intimacy of these constant visits that almost bewilders and stuns us. When we reflect who God is, and consider His exalted and dread Majesty, a mere look from Him, a single word, or simple admission into His presence, would seem to be all too much. But, in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar, He enters into the most intimate recesses of our hearts; He draws closer to us than friend to friend, than mother to child, than the bridegroom to his bride. He becomes our food and nourishment, our strength and our life. "In this Sacrament, worthily received," writes Bishop Hedley ("A Spiritual Retreat," 135), "the holy and powerful personality of Jesus comes into contact with the being of a man, into a nearness that did not exist before. It is a contact of power or of virtue, in the scholastic phrase: faculty affects faculty; intellect affects intellect; will touches will; holiness seeks room for itself; humility and obedience flow in like a tide; love and piety penetrate like the morning light. Christ is in us like a diffused aroma, influencing, bracing, intensifying, sanctifying all

the springs of spiritual life, and even natural life."

This is but one of the many manifestations of God's immense love. To realize His love as we ought, we should consider them all in detail, and pass them slowly in review, one by one. But, as that would fill a great volume, we must entrust the profitable task to the zeal and the industry of the reader. Passing by other striking proofs of God's love, we must here satisfy ourselves with merely pointing to one other, though perhaps the most splendid and magnificent. We refer to the sublime and supremely glorious end for which God has destined us.

There are countless different ways in which God might have rewarded us for serving Him and keeping His commandments. In fact, our supreme end might not have been supernatural at all. But God has chosen to create us for the very highest and most exalted possible—for an end so superb and so inconceivably magnificent as to be naturally absolutely out of our reach, and unattainable by any efforts of our own. Nothing that man, *left to himself,* could do or suffer could ever deserve it. In fact, it is so stupendous that there is no sort of proportion between man's natural merits and the rewards prepared for him by the goodness and

the munificence of God. No human mind can so much as form an idea of their value. Even St. Paul himself can tell us nothing, though he had been given some momentary experience of what they are, when he was caught up into the third heaven. All he is able to say, though speaking under inspiration, is that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the mind of man (to conceive) what God hath prepared for those that love Him" (I Cor., ii. 9).

To know that such an unutterably sublime destiny really awaits us at the end of a short earthly life of trial and temptation safely passed, seems almost too good to be true. The prospect almost takes our breath away, and indicates a goodness and a generosity on the part of God that is far too deep for words, and far beyond the mind to conceive or fathom. For, although we shall certainly have the same body and the same soul in that future abode, yet they will both be so changed and transformed and beautified that, while realizing that we are indeed the same person, we shall feel quite other beings. It will be almost as though we had been recreated and immeasurably improved and changed, and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond anything we can

now imagine. How delighted we were, as small children, to listen to the wondrous effects of a fairy's wand, as we followed with breathless interest the wonders that it wrought! How we rejoiced, for instance, to contemplate poor ill-used Cinderella, a despised household drudge, ragged and dirty, and lying neglected in the back scullery, being suddenly transformed by the magic of a fairy's wand into the most lovely of princesses, clothed with the costliest garments and dazzling with diamonds and precious stones, and with the noblest prince in the land imploring her hand! Yet this imaginary transformation is *nothing at all* compared to the transformations that are really to take place, when the just man enters upon his own in the celestial mansions above. In sooth, what we are promised in heaven is so wonderful, so delightful, so mysterious, so exquisitely attractive, and let me add so very soon to be experienced (at all events, so far as the soul is concerned), that it is exceedingly difficult to understand how so many even of those who believe should seem so extraordinary apathetic, and should think so seldom about it. God might have decided to reward us by giving each of the saved a thousand or more beautiful worlds to rule over. But that would not have satisfied His love, so

He resolved to be infinitely more generous, and to give us nothing earthly, nothing limited, nothing created, nothing temporal—nothing less than Himself. "I am thy Reward exceeding great" (Gen., xv. 1). This gift is so absolutely unique, so utterly beyond price, and so infinite *in se,* that we may declare without any exaggeration and with absolute truth that (1) although God is infinitely powerful, He is unable to give us anything greater; (2) though infinitely rich, He does not possess anything more priceless; and (3) though infinite in wisdom, He knows of nothing more joy-giving and desirable.

Did we but know and realize the happiness of heaven now, as the Saints above know it, and were we then to be given our choice, we would infinitely rather experience its delights, even were it but for one full minute, than swim in an ocean of worldly delights for a thousand years. This stands to reason, for there is no comparison, and there can be no comparison whatever, between all created joys of earth, however intense and alluring and however many times multiplied and united in one individual, on the one hand, and the joy arising from the possession and enjoyment of the uncreated and infinite God, on the other. Once you can get

infinite Beauty into one scale of the balance, you may continue to add weight after weight to the other scale, but you will never weigh it down, or even secure an even balance. The infinite must ever be incomparably beyond the finite.

Most mercifully, God has in pity withheld from us the adequate knowledge of those celestial joys, for, did we fully understand them, the knowledge would not only cause us to lose all interest in the things of time, and make it quite impossible to pay proper attention to the duties of our earthly life, but it would fill and flood our whole being with such insatiable and irresistible longing for our home above that we should be inconsolable, and would suffer a continuous agony, such as would beggar all description, and be comparable only to the agony of a lost soul. The agony of a lost soul is, of course, immeasurably worse, because the separation from God, the Infinite Good, is eternal and without remedy, whereas the soul still on earth and in the body would know that its separation need be but temporary. Yet, while it lasted, the agony would be akin to that of a lost soul and dreadful beyond words.

Surely, noone can dwell on the limitless goodness of God in thus preparing such a glorious future for every faithful soul whom He has

created, without his whole heart being set on fire with transports of gratitude and love. This would be true even though the reward were to last for but a limited time, but it becomes infinitely more so, when the devout soul goes on to reflect that it is to last so long as God Himself shall last—that is to say, for ever and for ever. Well may we understand what we read in the life of St. Teresa, namely, that while assisting at holy Mass, when she heard the choir sing the words of the Credo: *Cujus regni non erit finis,* she was wont to fall into an ecstasy, and lose all consciousness of sublunary things, so greatly was she moved by the thought.

Kings and emperors and the great ones of this world deem themselves fortunate if they can rule and reign over a few miles of this miserable earth for a brief space; but, when God crowns a faithful soul that has conquered the devil, the world and the flesh, and raises it to kingly dignity, He sets it on a throne of indescribable glory, to reign, not for a few years nor even for a few hundred centuries, but for the whole of an endless eternity. By these and like considerations, we should seek to enkindle a more burning love of God in our tepid hearts.

The vital importance of this cannot be overstated, and for this simple reason—because, as

we have already said and now repeat, the measure of our love of God while on earth will be the measure of our reward in heaven. This truth is well expressed by the well-known Père Grou, S.J. ("The Love of God," p. 92), in the following words: "The rank, the riches, and the various degrees of the Blessed depend only on the degree of love that each one has reached here below, for there will be no other distinction among the saved in heaven, except only that founded on the different degrees of love to which they attained on earth."

So soon as a soul departs from this life and comes into the unveiled presence of God (purified, we are supposing, from all sin), it finds itself within the overpowering attraction of His goodness and beauty. No magnet ever attracted a piece of steel with anything like the irresistible force with which God attracts the soul. No one gazing upon His infinite perfections can resist the impulse to fly towards Him, or restrain the ardor of its longing to be united with the supreme Source of all good.

This ought to be self-evident to the meanest capacity, for it is a well-known law of our nature that our soul is drawn and influenced by goodness. Let us pause for a moment to consider that our human will has been so formed

by God that it is always and necessarily seeking after that which is good, or at all events after that which (whether good or bad) *presents itself under the appearance of good.* As all philosophers teach, the will is so constructed that it cannot possibly be attracted by evil, *considered as evil,* but only in so far as it assumes the appearance of good. Before evil can move the will to desire it, it is absolutely necessary that it should assume at least the outward guise of good. In short, the will naturally and necessarily seeks the good and *only* the good, so that evil has no chance whatever of being sought after, until and unless it first clothes itself with the livery of the good. It is only by a system of camouflage that the devil, who is an adept in deceit, can ever win over the human will to choose evil, instead of good.

If we will only reflect upon that undeniable truth, we may perhaps form a more accurate idea of the irresistible attraction of God, the eternal and infinite Goodness, so soon as the soul is permitted to gaze upon Him in all His unveiled majesty.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### CONFIDENCE IN GOD

*"Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And, if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee"* (Is., xlix. 15).

THERE is perhaps no virtue that brings such peace and content to the heart, even amid difficulties and contradictions, as confidence in God. The Saints for the most part experienced heavy trials, and had to face many and great tribulations; yet they were always calm, tranquil and self-possessed. St. Teresa was wont to exclaim in all her troubles: "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing affright you. All passes away. God only shall stay. Patience wins all. Who hath God, needeth nothing, for God is his All." She never lost her peace of mind; yet she is but an example of what we find in all the great servants of God.

This virtue of confidence in God is especially necessary for priests in their arduous work and heavy responsibilities, and should be carefully

cultivated by them, for it will keep them perfectly peaceful in the midst of difficulties, perfectly tranquil in the midst of temptations, and will buoy them up with an extraordinary sense of security, even when dangers seem most threatening. Now, the virtue of confidence rests upon a most firm foundation. It is founded upon three of the most conspicuous attributes of God. There is a common saying: *Omne trinum perfectum.* There is a trinity, not only in God, but in all He has created; and it is certainly found in the virtue of trust or confidence. Speaking of material things, mechanics tell us that there is no more stable support to be found anywhere than in a tripod. A table with four or more legs is certain to wabble if there be the slightest difference in the length of the legs. But, where there are only three legs, the support is steady and firm, even though there should be some slight difference between one leg and another. That is the reason why photographers will always choose a tripod on which to rest their camera, for in taking photographs any unsteadiness would be fatal.

Now, confidence will be maintained secure and firm and unhesitating so long as we rest it upon a tripod. The three legs of the tripod —if we may so express ourselves—are the three

attributes of God, *viz.*, His power, His knowledge, and His love. To understand and realize these three attributes, is to enjoy perfect peace and tranquillity, for they afford us the most certain grounds of trust—a trust which we can never lose, so long as our faith in these attributes remains.

Let us suppose a case. Here is a priest exposed to some terrible temptation, or to some exceptionally great danger. He may be for the moment troubled, anxious, and upset. But, so soon as he calls to mind the three attributes of God, peace will be immediately restored to his soul. For he will say to himself: "God is omniscient. He knows exactly what I am suffering and the dangers surrounding me. He sees, even more clearly than I do, the peril I am in. No exposition of my own case could render it any clearer to Him than it is at present. He is omniscient! . . . But He is also omnipotent. He can help me to conquer. He can either rescue me, or give me sufficient strength to resist as I ought. Without effort and without difficulty, and by a mere act of His will, He can reduce all my enemies to naught. He holds me in the hollow of His hands, and, unless He permits it, no evil can touch me."

When it is fully realized that God is both

omniscient and omnipotent, then but one other question need be asked. Will He make use of His knowledge and of His power—in short, is there anything to move Him? Though He sees the straits I am in, and though He is quite able to help me, *will He actually do so?* Here we call to mind the third attribute of God, His infinite love. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And, if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Is., xlix. 15). If we really believe in God's love, every doubt is dissipated and vanishes into thin air.

Should any doubt still linger in our mind, it must be only because we harbor some doubt concerning one or another of the three great attributes of God. Either we persuade ourselves that He does not really know the gravity of the situation, or else we imagine that He is unable to bring us succor, or lastly we must doubt the genuineness of His goodness and His love. If our faith fails us, then of course all is lost. But, so long as we believe in God at all, we must likewise believe in the divine attributes of God, and they will enable us to preserve our peace of mind and our confidence in every vicissitude and change of fortune. If our confidence fails us, we should pause to examine

which of the three attributes it is that we doubt, *for it must be one of them.* Then, on discovering it, we should ponder on the many and solid proofs that support it, until at last we are led to understand how well-founded and undeniable this attribute is.

A calm consideration of these three divine attributes should inspire us with unhesitating confidence. Take any example. Suppose, for instance, that what we particularly desire is the grace of a really peaceful and happy death. At once we think of God's omniscience, of His omnipotence, and of His love. And we cry out to Him, with unwavering trust: "Grant me, O God, a holy and happy death—a death precious in Thy sight. Thou art omniscient, and knowest exactly how things are; Thou art omnipotent, and canst arrange and dispose things just as Thou wilt; and Thou art infinitely loving, and wilt make use of Thy omniscience and of Thy omnipotence to secure for me a death precious in Thy sight."

One who commits himself to God in this way, and who remembers His three divine attributes, will feel that he has nothing to disturb or to trouble him in the circumstances and the surroundings of his last end. The omniscience, the omnipotence and the love of God for us are

absolute and certain guarantees of our obtaining what we desire.

In order to increase this confidence still further, God has commanded us to address Him as Father. This title is pregnant with the deepest meaning, and is a perfect revelation of His infinite love. He wishes to be called Father, because He wishes us thereby to understand the nature and the strength of His love for us. It is His way of telling us that His affection for us is as personal and as intense, and His solicitude as watchful and as constant as that of the most perfect earthly father for his own child. He further enforces and illustrates this by beautiful examples, as for instance when He asks: "Which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? Or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father from heaven give* the good Spirit to them that ask Him" (Luke, xi. 11-13). It is not necessary to recall to mind the Parable of the Prodigal Son and other allegorical narratives which illustrate God's fatherly interest, compassion and love of us, for they are already well known to all my readers. But they should be frequently before

the mind of any one who is tempted to doubt the strong and personal love of God for even the least worthy of His poor imperfect creatures.

We will end this chapter with some reflections on the most consoling thought of God's wonderful providence over us, and of the truly admirable manner in which He deigns to make use of us. We know no one who has stated this truth more clearly or more attractively than the late Cardinal Newman in a little volume entitled "Meditations and Devotions." He begins by reminding us that many men persuade themselves that God is so great that He disdains to look down upon such poor uninteresting creatures as we are, and cannot be in any way concerned with our doings and fortunes. But they should surely know that He, who did not find it beneath His infinite majesty to make us, does not think it beneath Him to observe and to visit us. Not only did He determine from all eternity that He would create us, but He arranged our path through life. And, "if He did not absolutely decree to bring us to heaven, it is because we have free will, and by the very constitution of our nature He has put it in part out of His power, for we must do *our* part, if to heaven we attain. But He has done everything short of this. He died for us all upon

the Cross that, if it were possible to save us, we might be saved. And He calls upon us lovingly, begging us to accept the benefit of His meritorious and most precious Blood. And those who trust Him He takes under His special protection. He marks out their whole life for them; He appoints all that happens to them; He guides them in such way as to secure their salvation; He gives them just so much of health, of wealth, of friends, as is best for them. He afflicts them only when it is for their good. He is never angry with them. He measures out just that number of years which is good for them, and He appoints the hour of their death in such a way as to secure their perseverance up to it" (*op. cit.*, 284-85). Considering the almost infinite number of beings that God has brought into existence, it does seem marvelous that He should bestow more than a passing thought on any single individual. Yet His attention to each individual, and His watchful care even for the least and most insignificant child in existence, is enough to bewilder and to astound one. It is undeniably true, yet it almost takes one's breath away when one tries to realize it, that God has determined from all eternity every event of my life. Again, let us express the thought in the limpid words of the great

Cardinal: "God has determined, unless I interfere with His plan, that I shall reach that which will be my greatest happiness. He looks upon me individually. He calls me by my name, He knows what I can do, what I can best be, what is my greatest happiness, and He means to give it me. Yes, *God* knows what is my greatest happiness, but *I* do not. There is no rule about what is happy and good; what suits one would not suit another. And the ways by which perfection is reached vary very much. The medicines necessary for our souls are very different from each other. Thus God leads us by strange ways; we know He wills our happiness, but we neither know what our happiness is, nor the way. We are blind: left to ourselves, we should take the wrong way: we must leave it to Him" (*op. cit.*, 398).

Another wonderful fact admirably brought out by Cardinal Newman is that God not only had a special reason for creating me, but that He had a special work for me to do for Him in this world. Since He is almighty, He might have determined to do all things Himself. But He preferred to give others a share in His work and to bring about His purposes by means of the beings He has created. In this sense, we are all without exception—but more especially

we priests—created for His glory, created to do His will. In the words of Cardinal Newman, I may truthfully say: "I am created to do something, or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has; whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man, God knows me and calls me by my name. God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his. If indeed I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling" (*op. cit.*, 399-400).

Surely, to realize all this even but faintly must make us conscious of the extraordinary nearness of God and of His great love, as well

as of our real dignity and worth in His eyes. How proud we should be to serve Him, and how anxious to fulfill His will and carry out the work which His providence has assigned to us! Happy indeed is the priest who, when he comes to die, can exclaim in the words of his divine Master, dying upon the Cross: "It is consummated (John, xix. 30). I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do (John, xvii. 4)."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### MOTIVES FOR PASTORAL ZEAL

*"Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat"* (Matt., vii. 13).

ONE of the greatest and most important characteristics of every true priest is a burning love for souls and an ardent and ever-increasing desire to secure their salvation. This desire is enkindled by a great number of powerful, though very different motives.

(1) The chief, no doubt, is the example of Jesus Christ. When we call to mind that God became man, and that He deemed it worth His while to suffer and to die an ignominious death in order that He might rescue men from eternal damnation, we should feel that we too ought to be ready, not only to exert ourselves, but to suffer anything however painful to promote the end for the sake of which He became obedient "even unto the death of the Cross." When, further, we consider that He established His

Church, and watches over and protects it, and endows it with infallibility to the end of time; and that He has founded the seven Sacraments, each of which contains so many marvels, *in order to help souls to reach their high destiny,* we should realize something of the importance of the work entrusted to us as the divinely appointed coadjutors of Christ.

(2) Another motive is the immense value of a soul, made to the likeness and image of God, whose destiny is at stake. Our Lord made no mystery of the value and the dignity of a soul. He taught openly that a single one is worth more than the entire world, that it is of priceless value, and that absolutely nothing exists for which it can be exchanged. Speaking to St. Bridget, He is recorded to have said: "I, who created thee, have subjected every member of My Body and all the powers of My Soul to suffering and punishment for thy sake." And, referring to the damned, He declared that "He would willingly have endured His passion and death over again, had it been possible, for the salvation of each one that was lost."

(3) Yet another very strong motive urging us to do our utmost to save souls, is the thought of the indescribable torments that will inevitably be theirs, if they are lost. Pause for a moment

and reflect that one of the strongest incentives to zeal is a serious consideration, on the part of the pastor, of the very real and imminent danger in which so many of his own parishioners stand of being cast into the inextinguishable fires of hell. As there is little external to remind us of this, we do not advert to it as we should. In fact, we perhaps scarcely admit the reality of the danger even to ourselves. Yet, however much we may wish it were otherwise, we are bound to confess—if we have looked into the matter at all—that the greatest and the most weighty authorities are of opinion that, not "some" only, but the "majority" (some say the *great* majority) of adult Catholics are lost! Even Father Faber, who took an exceptionally lenient view himself, candidly admitted at the same time that the great weight of authority was—and of course still is—against him.

Consider for a moment what hell is. The inspired word of God declares it to be "a bottomless pit of inextinguishable fire"—a fire which penetrates everywhere, even into the very marrow of the bones, and which not only preserves the life of its victim, but (*terribile dictu*) which also maintains his sensibility and full capacity of suffering undiminished for all eterity. We know the terrible agony which an

earthly fire causes. Let us think of it, and then remember that theologians and spiritual writers tell us that the very worst fire with which we are aquainted, is but as a painted fire compared to the fire of hell. Consider further that it is continuous, ceaseless, without variation or intermission century after century for all eternity.

Consider again that, great and intense and wholly indescribable as this pain of sense must be, there is another pain suffered by the damned in hell which is immeasurably worse, and a thousand times more unbearable—a pain indeed of which we have no experience in this life, yet one much more to be dreaded than the pain of sense: this is, *the pain of loss*. Thus, to cite a single authority, St. John Chrysostom, that famous luminary of the Church, declares that the united torments of a thousand hells would be nothing compared with the punishment which a damned soul feels in the loss of God.[1] Remember, this is no fable, but a stupendous and a ghastly reality. Who is there that would expose even his worst enemy to such a fate? Who can contemplate without horror and dismay even the most hopelessly wicked sinner burning for ever and ever in such a prison?

[1] His actual words are: "Si mille quis ponat gehennas, *nihil* tale dicturus est, quale est a beatæ illius gloriæ honore repelli."

Realizing the risk that many even of his own parishioners are running of having to submit to such an appalling fate, a pastor would be less than human did he remain cold or indifferent. If he warns not his flock of their danger, God Himself will exact a most strict account at his hands. "If," says the Almighty, who has called us to coöperate with Him in the sublime work of the redemption, "if, when I say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die: thou declare it not to him, nor speak to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way, and live: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but *I will require his blood at thy hand.*" Even if, in any particular case, there seems to be little hope of impressing the evil-doer and of bringing him to the Sacraments, we should at least make the attempt, and do our best, for this is most certainly required of us by our divine Master, who says: "But if thou give warning to the wicked, and he be not converted from his wickedness, and from his evil way: he indeed shall die in his iniquity, *but thou hast delivered thy soul*" (Ezech., iii. 18-19). This clearly implies that, in case of any neglect in this matter, we shall place our own salvation in danger. It is the duty of the pastor to exhort and to warn—to point out the many dangers that stand in the

way of salvation for his flock—and it will go hard with him if he allows any member to perish everlastingly through carelessness, indifference, or apathy.

To God alone, of course, is known the final number of the lost and the saved. All that even Saints and great theologians can do is to express opinions founded upon weighty reasons and serious considerations, which deserve respect and attention. From their study of men's lives and the prevailing habits, customs, and worldliness of the millions even of Catholics, on the one hand, and from their knowledge of the essential conditions of salvation, on the other hand, they come to a conclusion which is, to say the least, both distressing and disheartening in the extreme.

Setting aside altogether the heathen population of the globe, which outnumbers all others, and disregarding the immense variety of heretics, who are to be found in most civilized countries, we will confine ourselves to the three hundred or three hundred and fifty million members of the True Church. Here a distinction is generally made, according to whether children are included or not.

Where children are included, many—perhaps most—theologians and spiritual writers think

that the majority of Catholics are saved. Father Faber, who seems to have made a study of this subject, writes: "The rigorous opinions concerning the damnation of the majority of adult Catholics have more theologians on their side than the milder view" ("Creator and the Creature," book III, chap. ii). And Fra E. da Chitignano, O.S.F., declares ("L'Uomo in Paradiso," p. 269) that "St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephrem, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Anselm, and many more *most learned men of the highest virtue,* have held the opinion that the majority of adult Catholics are condemned to hell for all eternity." He adds the following words: "Even Suarez, who expresses the opposite opinion, confesses that the more common opinion is against him." [2]

Cornelius à Lapide, in his *Commentary* on James, ii. 13, writes: "That more Christian adults will be damned than saved, seems to be

[2] As we take no responsibility for the opinion, we give his actual words: "Oltre i santi Padri S. Girolamo, Sant' Agostino, S. Basilio, S. Giovanni Crisostomo, Sant' Efrem, S. Gregorio Magno e Sant' Anselmo, S. Nilo presso il Baronio, S. Simeone Stilita, S. Teodoro, il Gaetano, il Bellarmino, l'Abulense e molti altri *uomini dottissimi e di somma virtu,* sono di opinione che la maggior parte dei fedeli adulti non entri nel numero degli eletti. Lo stesso Suarez, il quale con altri sapienti e di contrario parere, confessa che l'opinione piu comune e quella, che la maggior parte dei fedeli adulti vada tra i reprobi" (chap. 16, p. 269).

the teaching of reason and authority." He gives various reasons, of which one is as follows: "Because by far the greater number of Christians live in the state of mortal sin, and according to St. Augustine's rule that 'as a man lives, so shall he die,' it is a rare occurrence for one who has lived badly to die well and *vice versa*."

Persons who maintain the more lenient view, and think that very many more Catholics are saved than are lost, do so because they tell us that the vast majority of Catholics, even the evil-livers and the careless, will send for the priest when dying, and will receive the Last Sacraments. But it must be admitted that such death-bed conversions are really far from easy, and are seldom satisfactory. In the first place, it will be an exception to the great principle which seems accepted everywhere: "As a man lives, so will he die." A dying man may indeed send for the priest, but, if his whole life has been passed in neglect of God and in satisfying his passions, what are the chances of his eliciting an efficacious retractation of his whole past life, such as to secure for him pardon and absolution? Before he can be said to have true penitence, three conditions are laid down by theologians. We will quote from the well-known Re-

cupitus, S.J., whose words are exceptionally clear: "For true penitence three conditions are required: first, that there be a detestation of sin from a supernatural motive; second, that sin be detested above all evils, or at least, according to the milder view, above all temporal evils, even above death itself, so that our sorrow for sin is really greater than for any other evil whatever; third, that our penitence be combined with a firm resolution of never sinning again, which resolution must extend, at least virtually and generally, to all occasions of sin in such a manner that we are firmly determined to avoid sin despite any danger that this may entail and despite the loss of our reputation and life. If any one of these three conditions is wanting, our penitence is not true, nor is it such as will justify us even combined with the Sacrament; for all three conditions are essential."

Well may St. Peter ask: "If the just man shall be saved with difficulty (μόλις), where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter, iv. 18.)

When our blessed Lord was asked: "Are they few that are saved?" He refused to answer it speculatively, but put forward this practical lesson: Those who do not *strive* to enter in by the narrow gate, put their salvation into

most imminent jeopardy; for many shall *seek* to enter, and shall not be able (cfr. Luke, xiii. 24). And in the parallel place, He exclaims: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are who find it" (Matt., viii. 14). Commenting on these words, Dr. W. G. Ward, who taught dogmatic theology for many years, writes: "Now I really do not see how words can have any meaning, if such a saying as this is consistent with the view that the mass of Catholics are saved by death-bed repentance. Who can imagine any mode of *seeking,* as distinct from *striving,* more utterly poor and inefficacious than this: that a man shall give his whole life to the devil, send for a priest at the approach of death, listen to him with attention, and put forth a languid, feeble superficial echo to such thoughts as are suggested? I, for one, cannot imagine a 'gate' which shall be much wider, or a 'way' which shall be more simply a thoroughfare, than will be, on such a supposition, the gate and the way which lead to heaven—that gate and that way, of which our Blessed Saviour says that the gate is narrow and the way confined" ("Attrition, Contrition, and Sovereign Love," 44). In his "De Pœnitentia" (diss. iv, art. vii), writes the great theologian Billuart: "According to the holy Fathers

and all theologians, it is a very rare and difficult thing to attain true and sincere penitence when this is postponed until the hour of death."

Indeed it is a well-recognized proverb to be found in every Christian land: "As a man lives, so shall he die." In Erance they say: "Telle vie, telle mort"; and in Italy: "Qualis vita, finis ita." There can be no doubt but that the general opinion as to the small number of saved, even among adult Catholics, is positively terrifying, and, though we may not accept such a depressing view ourselves, we shall be wise to work and toil and exert ourselves as though it were as well founded as it appears to be.

But, let us remember that, if there be much on the one hand to make us fear, there is much also on the other hand to restore confidence. In the first place, we know that no one can ever be damned except through his own fault. As a recent writer says: "None are in hell but those who in clear consciousness, with attention and intention, committed mortal sin and deliberately remained in it till they died. . . . The only way to hell is to walk into it with open eyes" (J. Arendzen, "What Becomes of the Dead," 86). Then we have to consider the goodness of God and His genuine desire to save us, together with His infinite power and boundless resources.

"God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John, iii. 16). "God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim., ii. 4). "The Lord dealeth patiently, not willing that they should perish, but that all should return to penance" (II Peter, iii. 3). "I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners" (Matt., ix. 13). "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezech., xxxiii. 11). "God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by Him" (John, iii. 17). "Thou hast mercy on all because Thou canst do all things, and overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance" (Wis., xi. 24). "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy" (Ps., cii. 8). "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things?" (Rom., viii. 32.) Such are a few of the consoling promises made by God, and many more are to be found scattered up and down throughout the Holy Scriptures. No theory, which cannot be

reconciled with them, can be tolerated or admitted.

To us it seems incredible that the Incarnation and Passion and bitter Death of the Incarnate God upon the Cross should result in what seems to us at least to be such a dismal failure. Just consider the stupendous graces conferred upon the world by the thousands of Masses, offered up all the day long in one part of the world or another, and the extraordinary power and efficacy of the seven great Sacraments instituted by Christ, and the impetrative force of earnest prayer rising day and night from priests and religious and holy souls, and we shall feel fully persuaded that the number for whom our Blessed Lord suffered and died and who are eternally saved, must be very far in excess of what Fra E. da Chitignano, O.S.F., is inclined to admit.

However, the number is a profound secret in God's keeping, which will not be revealed to us in this life. All we are called to do, is to keep watch over the faithful entrusted to our care, and to guard them to the utmost of our power, to point out the dangers that beset them, and to pray more and more earnestly every day for their salvation. In a Catholic country, where the whole population is nominally Catholic,

there will no doubt be a much larger proportion of their number living in sin than will be found among Catholics living in a Protestant country. In England and America and other non-Catholic regions, Catholics are but a minority, and they have to assert themselves more, and to exert themselves in order to overcome opposition and the hostility of the anti-Catholic majority. To exist at all, they are obliged to fight and to struggle, and will therefore be on the whole more robust in their faith, and more actively earnest in the practice of their religion than Catholics elsewhere, so that the percentage of Catholics qualifying for heaven will doubtless be greater in Protestant countries than in Catholic, and this may account *in some measure* for the dismal view, since the authorities cited had little experience of any but Catholic countries.

It may seem rash and even presumptuous to differ from the great Saints and renowned theologians, who are of the opinion that a larger number of adult Catholics are lost than are saved, but I am bound to say that my own experience, which extends over nearly half a century, would lead me to a much more happy conclusion. With all due respect to such eminent authorities, I cannot bring myself to favor their view. Of course, one finds some negligent

and indifferent Catholics in every parish, who will neither listen nor amend, and one may well feel alarmed about their ultimate fate; but the great bulk of the people are God-fearing, assist at Mass, come to the Sacraments, and are trying to keep the commandments, and we would be very sorry and unwilling to entertain the notion that any large proportion of them were destined for a fate far too terrible for words—far too horrible to contemplate.

When once we have formed a just idea of the excruciating agony and of the endless duration of hell, the thought of even one single member of our parish being sent there will be enough to fill us with indescribable horror and dismay. The mere risk that some of them are undoubtedly running, will rouse us like a trumpet-call, and will urge us at any cost to try and rescue them from such an appalling end.

We may encourage ourselves further by considering the heartfelt gratitude of any soul in heaven, who has been snatched like "a brand from the burning" by the zeal and the efforts of a zealous pastor. Every sinner who feels that he owes his salvation (after God) to the solicitude and fatherly care of his pastor, will be filled with the feelings of the most intense gratitude, and will never cease to pray for his benefactor

till he too is safe in his heavenly home. Thus, by exhorting and warning and helping our parishioners to avoid the "second death," we shall be not only doing a great and important work and bringing down upon ourselves the special blessing of God, but we shall be raising up a most powerful army of earnest advocates, who will plead for us without ceasing before the throne of God's mercy, and obtain for us countless blessings here in this world and in the next an increase of celestial beatitude and happiness. Just imagine the feelings of a zealous priest just entering heaven, if one of the blessed after another should come and salute him, and say: "But for your zeal and loving solicitude while on earth, I would now be with the damned in hell. To you, under God, I owe it that I am eternally in an ecstasy of glory and peace. Had you left me unassisted, and not tried again and again to arouse me from my sin, I must most certainly have sunk, like so many others, in the 'furnace of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth' " (Matt., xiii. 42).

Noone can so much as imagine the gratitude and the love that must burn in the hearts of those favored souls who are now secure in heaven because of the earnest care and industry of a devoted and conscientious pastor, ever la-

boring and praying for the souls committed to his charge.

Let this thought inspire us, and urge us to greater and yet greater zeal on behalf of our feeble and often severely tempted flock. "Let us," writes Cardinal Vaughan, "attach the highest possible value to souls. No matter under what exterior form they may be found, they deserve to be treated with the reverence and honor due to royal princes and princesses, who are heirs to a kingdom. The miner and the analyst know the worth of auriferous quartz, no matter how hard, rough and unsightly it may be; they know that nothing but the proper treatment is needed to set free the precious ore with which it is charged. Bear this thought in mind when dealing with the souls that do not naturally attract you" ("The Young Priest," 313-314).

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE IMMOLATION OF ONESELF TO GOD

*"For true perfection it is not sufficient that we worship and praise the Infinite God: it is also necessary that we always do what God wills, as He wills it, and because He wills it. We must, therefore, fulfill the will of God as to its substance, its manner, and its aim"* (Cardinal Vives, "Theol. Ascetico-Mysticæ," p. 32, § 74).

GOD, in His infinite goodness, invites us all to be saints. "Be ye holy as your heavenly Father is holy," are words addressed, not to one favored class only, but to every one of us living in this world. And, as God never issues an invitation that is beyond our power to accept, we are bound to admit that there is not one of us who might not become a saint, if he really willed to do all that is requisite on his part. The work itself is a divine work. No man can make himself a saint. God, and God alone, can raise a man to the heights of sanctity. But he is prepared to do this for *every one of us* on one

condition, and that is that we leave Him a free hand, and put no obstacle in the way. Jesus Christ is the absolutely perfect. He is our model and example, and we shall become more or less perfect in proportion to the extent in which we succeed or fail in rendering ourselves like to Him.

How is this to be accomplished? It is essentially a supernatural work, and God alone can bring it about. In fact, unless He do it, it will not be done. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Ps., cxxvi. 1). If, therefore, I wish sincerely to sanctify my soul, I must give myself up wholly and entirely and unreservedly to God. I must make a complete offering of myself to Him, and, if this offering is properly and generously made and not recalled, then God will in a short time clothe me in the image of His divine Son, and make of me a saint.

The action of God upon a soul that has offered itself unreservedly to Him may be compared to the action of some consummate artist upon a piece of fine marble. Enter in spirit the studio of some famous sculptor. A huge block of pure white Carrara marble lies before him. He has genius and creative ability enough, let us suppose, to transform this shapeless block into the

most perfect form imaginable. In the exercise of his extraordinary and phenomenal talent, he can make of it a thing of such exquisite beauty that kings and emperors will desire it to adorn their palaces or to enrich their famous galleries. Yes, he may make this rough stone out of the common quarry "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever," but only upon one condition—on the sole condition that the marble will yield itself up to him entirely and allow him to deal with it just as he pleases. For just think what the consequences would be, if the marble were to develop likes and dislikes, or to show a will of its own and to put itself in opposition to the artist. In order to turn the solid block of marble into some graceful and artistic figure, the sculptor must apply his chisel, and the hard blows of his hammer chipping off fragments of the marble will frequently have to be felt. Now, to suppose the marble to be endowed (as man is) with a will of its own, and not altogether in complete subjection to the will of the artist, would be to suppose that the block might so interfere with the artist's work that he would find it *impossible* to carry out his admirable purpose, and all his attempts to transform the rough marble into a superb and enchanting figure would be in vain.

If the marble possessed free will (as we do), and refused to submit to the painful processes by means of which the sculptor gradually bestows upon it the most exquisite form and beauty, the result would be disastrous. If the marble refused to keep still under the blows of the chisel, or if it declined to have gashes, deep cuts and incisions made into it, or if it in any way limited the freedom of the master-sculptor to treat it as he wished, then the marble would remain shapeless, useless and imperfect, and would never attain to that priceless and matchless perfection to which the sculptor of infinite skill would most undoubtedly have raised it, had it placed itself unconditionally and *a capite ad calcem* in his power to treat it and to deal with it just as he thought best.

Precisely the same thing may be said of the Divine Artist, Almighty God. Give Him a free hand, leave all the ways and means to Him, let Him treat you as He likes, let Him send you prosperity or adversity, health or disease, riches or poverty, success or failure, honor or dishonor, friends or foes, and do not complain, for He alone knows without the shadow of a doubt what will lead most surely and most efficaciously to the desired result, and, after all, that is all you should desire. For, to give yourself to God

body and soul, means to renounce all self-guidance in order to be guided in everything by grace; it supposes that you are no longer led by any self-will in anything whatsoever, but that you sincerely will only what God wills. In short, you utterly renounce your own liberty in order that God may control and dispose of it exactly as He pleases. "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God" (Ps., cxlii. 10), is the prayer that should be constantly on our lips.

This complete donation of ourselves to God is not only the most direct and the shortest road to sanctity, but it is what God has every right to demand of us. Is it not just that I should give myself entirely and without reserve to Him who has drawn me out of nothing, and who at each instant preserves the being He has bestowed upon me—who indeed is my first beginning and my last end and my sovereign good, from whom I have received all, from whom I expect all, and who alone can make me supremely happy and eternally blessed? Has God any need of me? None whatever; whether I exist or exist not, whether I give myself to Him or refuse to give myself to Him, He will not be one whit more or less happy. Why then does He insist that I should surrender myself entirely to Him? It is because right order re-

quires it. God cannot authorize me to remain master of myself, nor can I give myself to anyone but to Him. Should I claim the right and dispose of myself as I please, I am a usurper. I actually rob God of what is essentially His. Jesus Christ teaches us to say to our Heavenly Father: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Is there any moment in which God's will is not being accomplished in heaven? Then we should do our utmost that it should always be accomplished likewise here upon earth.

Furthermore, since God is my only supreme good and the only source of real and perfect beatitude, there can be no true happiness for me either in this life or in the next, except through my close union with Him. He is absolutely happy in Himself, and has no need of me, but I can never be truly happy apart from Him. Not all created things—not all the goods of the universe—can suffice to render me happy. For, like myself, they are one and all created out of nothing, and in themselves as utterly destitute of good as I am myself. Even though I were to possess them all and for ever, my heart would still remain empty, hungry, famished and discontented, for "the heart was made for God, and it can never rest until it rest in Him." If it

is made for God, it stands to reason that what is *infinitely less* than God can never satisfy or fill it. But observe, God will give Himself to me only in proportion to the extent in which I give myself to Him. As St. John of the Cross says, "that soul has greater communion with God, which is the most advanced in love, that is to say, whose will is most conformable to the will of God" (vol. I, p. 67). On the previous page he writes: "A close union between the soul and God takes effect when two wills, the will of God and the will of man, are conformed together, neither desiring aught repugnant to the other. Thus, the soul, when it shall have driven away from itself all that is contrary to the divine will, becomes transformed into God by love."

This complete conformity, at all times and under all circumstances, is not always easy to the sensual and imperfect man, for God may send him very heavy trials to perfect him. As St. John of the Cross observes (vol. II, p. 247): "This is the way God deals with those whom it is His will to exalt. He suffers them to be tempted, afflicted, tormented, and chastened inwardly and outwardly to the utmost limit of their capacity, that He may deify them, unite them to Himself in His wisdom." If indeed you wish to attain to the possession of Christ,

never seek Him without the Cross. St. Paul tells us that "whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom., viii. 14). But, to be led by the Spirit of God means that we have ceased to be led by our own spirit, and have delivered up our own will into the hands of God. It was with this thought before him, no doubt, that St. Ignatius was induced to compose the well-known and most beautiful prayer:

"Suscipe, Domine, universam meam libertatem. Accipe memoriam, intellectum atque voluntatem. Quidquid habeo vel possideo, mihi largitus es: id tibi totum restituo, ac tuæ prorsus voluntati trado gubernandum. Amorem tui solum cum gratia tua mihi dones, et dives sum satis; nec aliud quidquam ultra posco."

To add further strength to our argument, we may quote the words of that great master of the spiritual life, Blosius, who assures us that "no more pleasing offering can be made to God than the resignation of our will, because nothing is more dear to man than his own will and his own freedom. When a man, for God's sake, fights against and mortifies the indulgence of his own senses and his own self-will, even in the least things, he does a thing more pleasing to God than if he were to recall many dead men to

life" ("A Book of Spiritual Instruction," p. 24).

Père Grou, S.J., in his charming little volume entitled "A Little Book on the Love of God," argues that any one who gives himself wholly and entirely to God in the way we have hinted (1) is morally certain of salvation, (2) is freed from all pain of conscience, (3) enters into friendship with God, (4) enjoys peace of soul, (5) ensures the special protection of God, (6) receives the great gift of prayer, and (7) enters on the road of true holiness. He devotes an entire chapter to each of these headings, which I commend to the attention of my devout readers, as they are too long to quote *in extenso*.

In conclusion, let us pause for a moment to consider what peace and contentment we may derive, even amid trials, difficulties, sufferings and temptations, from the conviction that after all we are in reality lying passively in the hands of God, the infinitely great and the unapproachably skilled Artist, who by means of these very afflictions is now occupied in forming and fashioning us into the most perfect and beautiful image of His divine Son. He may indeed deal many a hard blow, and we may feel very acutely the keen edge of the chisel, but we will willingly and gratefully bear all so that we may become

that which He, in His immense love, is so anxious to make us, *viz.*, a worthy and exquisite image of Jesus Christ, who stands without a rival at the very summit and apex of creation. To Him be honor, glory and thanksgiving for ever and ever. Amen.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### ALMIGHTY GOD CONSIDERED AS OUR FATHER

*"As many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God"* (John, i. 12).

OF all the titles known to men, there is hardly one that denotes such interest and such love as the title "Father." What strong feelings of confidence, of dependence, and of affection are aroused by the word! How close and deep and thorough is the relationship that the title suggests! Yet, wonderful to say, it is as "my Father" that I can address God Himself! I also call my earthly parent "father," it is true. But a little reflection will convince me that it is a title that belongs far more truly to God than to any other being.

I come from God. I owe my entire being to Him alone. My body was formed by virtue of marvelous laws founded by Him, and my soul was the direct work of His hands. The act of creation is an act that involves and supposes infinite power, for it means to produce some-

thing out of nothing. And, just as God cannot delegate infinite power to a finite being, He cannot delegate to another the creation of a soul.

He is also my Father, inasmuch as every power, faculty, quality and attribute that I possess are His gifts. Not only does He bear me up and feed the flame of my life moment by moment and year by year, but, like the most indulgent of fathers, He constantly supplies all that I have need of. If I have any pleasure in life, if I enjoy health and wealth, friends and companions, amusements and recreations, it is all due to His gracious bounty, for I am so dependent upon Him that it is impossible for me to enjoy pleasures (even in ways contrary to His will) except with His concurrence. Thus, it is plain that, even according to nature, God is far more truly my father than any earthly parent could possibly be. If, therefore, there is a sacred and peremptory duty by which children are bound to love, honor and obey their earthly father, how immeasurably more strictly am I bound to love. honor and obey God, my heavenly Father.

But God, in His infinite goodness, has been pleased to become my Father by a title yet more excellent than even that of creation. From the

fact of creation, He necessarily becomes my Father in the *natural order*. But, by a stupendous mystery that surpasses our understanding, He has become my Father also in the *order of grace*.

To understand how this can be, let us consider, in the first place, that the title of Father belongs by right to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity, for the simple reason that He begets from eternity a Son like to Himself, of the same substance and of identical nature. Now, no creature could possibly be a son of God in this way, because it would be contrary to his nature. So by a marvelous invention of His love, and in order to make Himself my Father as far as it is possible, God has *united our human nature inseparably to the Person of His Son,* and by that means has adopted in Him all of us who belong to Him as Christians. Hence it follows that He who is the Father of Jesus Christ by nature, has become my Father by grace. He sees and acknowledges and loves me as His son in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it may truly be said that, by the mystery of the Incarnation, God has contrived to extend even to a poor creature like me the divine filiation, so that I share in the infinite tenderness of the love that the Eternal Father has for His only Son.

This adoption is a gift so eminent and so exalted in its nature, and unites me so intimately to God, that words fail to express it, and the very angels in heaven would envy me, were envy possible in that holy place. Furthermore, that "son of God by adoption" is no empty title, is proved by the many and truly magnificent consequences that follow from it.

In the first place, I thereby enter into the royal family of God, and actually form a part of it. The Head of this family, and "the Firstborn," is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. But I am incorporated into this family. He gave all who believe in Him "power to be made the sons of God" (John, i. 12).

In the second place, being in this sense most truly a son of God, I have a right to expect and to receive love and help and abundant graces from so good and so benign a Father. He will most undoubtedly deal with me most tenderly, will look upon me as another self, and will lavish upon me His affectionate caresses and His choicest graces. He will live ever with me, He will counsel and admonish me by His holy inspirations, and will share all my pleasures and pains, all my trials and my tribulations. Indeed, it may most truly be said that His one desire is to make me happy, both in time and in eternity.

Provided only that I behave as a dutiful son, I am *certain* to experience from Him such bounty and generosity that no goodness of earthly parents can compare with it, for He is an infinitely more perfect Father than can be found anywhere on earth, as He Himself implies when He asks: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how *much more* will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt., vii. 11.) In short, accepting the title of Father, God lovingly binds Himself to treat us with all the care, solicitude, and watchfulness of a perfect and model parent. Hence, we may reckon and rely upon His assistance and protection with the most absolute confidence at all times and under all circumstances, so long as we act towards Him as true sons.

In the third place, as soon as ever I became a son of God, I at once acquired a distinct right to the inheritance of heaven itself. As a child of God, I actually become an heir to God's own celestial kingdom, with all that it is and all that it contains. My right is so certain and so indisputable that nothing can possibly deprive me of it or place it in jeopardy, unless (by deliberate sin) I obstinately resolve to disinherit myself. No attempts of men or of demons can rob me

of this stupendous prize. That dreadful power rests with me alone. The gift may indeed be forfeited, but that can be only by my own act. No other being has power to inflict so ghastly and so irreparable a loss upon me.

In the fourth place, let me ask, what is the nature of this magnificent inheritance, of which I have so firm and so well-grounded an expectation? It is nothing else than the possession of the infinite God Himself. Though the created soul can never take full possession of God in His entirety—for the finite cannot ever hold the infinite—yet, *in so far as the creature is capable,* it will possess and enjoy the uncreated Being of God. Unless by some infidelity I wreck all my hopes, I shall actually enter heaven, and shall share in the very happiness of God Himself. That which constitutes God's happiness, will also constitute my happiness, although mine will necessarily be limited by the limits of my nature. In order that I may enjoy God's happiness, He will unite me to Himself by an indissoluble bond, which will continue for ever and ever, without fear of change, or diminution or loss. The saved soul, once it has "entered into the joy of the Lord," can never more run any risk of losing it. Its time of trial and of danger is over, and now it knows that it may rest peacefully

and securely for all eternity in the arms of its heavenly Father and in a state of perfect and undreamed-of beatitude.

Such is the glorious destiny awaiting all of us who, realizing God to be our Father, strive to show Him the devotion, the affection, and the respect and obedience of grateful sons. What a magnificent and splendid future lies before us! How short life is, and how rapidly the few years of our pilgrimage fly by, and how very soon we shall find ourselves (if we keep in the grace of God) knocking at the Golden Gates of Heaven! Then our heavenly Father will smile approvingly upon us, and, blessing us, will bid us "enter into the joy of our Lord" (Matt., xxv. 21).

The Scripture itself reminds us that the very purpose and object of the Incarnation was to make us "sons of God." "God sent His Son *that we might receive the adoption of sons*" (Gal., iv. 4-5). "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, *and should be,* the sons of God" (I John, iii. 1). "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. . . . You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit

that we are the sons of God; and if sons, heirs also" (Rom., viii. 14-17). It seems to have been Christ's special mission to lead men to His Father. "No man cometh to the Father but by Me" (John, xiv. 6). "Neither doth any one know the Father but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him" (Matt., xi. 27). "The tender parental affection felt by God our Father for all who strive to live as His faithful sons under the new law, is set forth by the great Prophet of the Incarnate," observes Cardinal Vaughan, "in most vivid and touching figures: 'Shall I, that gave generations to others, be barren, saith the Lord. . . . Ye shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall rock and caress you. As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted.' And again: 'Can a woman forget her infant so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And even if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in My hands'" (Is., xlix. 15-16).

These and many other inspired texts help us to interpret, as we should, the full significance of the term Father, and should fill and flood our souls with joy and confidence as well as with love for our infinite God, who, in spite of our

unworthiness, commands us to address Him by that which is the sweetest of titles.

The hope of pleasing Him now in this world, and still more the hope of one day being united with Him in heaven, should make us watch over ourselves most carefully, and induce us to do our utmost to carry out His will in all things, thus ensuring His divine friendship and love for ever and ever amid the entrancing delights and ecstatic joys of His glorious kingdom.

The more vividly we realize the consoling truth that God is indeed our Father in the fullest and best sense of the word, the more will this fact cheer and encourage us as we journey through this sad world to the great Home in which He awaits us. Not priests only, but all the faithful will find in this thought wonderful comfort and solace. We will conclude with a beautiful illustration to be found in a little book by Rev. P. Griffith, C.SS.R., entitled "The Golden Key." He writes: "A priest, traveling through the mountains of Auvergne, saw a boy at a little distance watching his sheep on the hill-side. Being struck by the little fellow's devout and recollected appearance, the priest spoke to him:

"'My child, do you feel very lonely here on this mountain-side all day by yourself?'

" 'Oh no, father, I am not at all lonely, I have something always to occupy me.'

" 'And what is that?'

" 'I have a beautiful prayer that I say.'

" 'Is it a long prayer?'

" 'No, father, it is a very short prayer, and yet I can never get to the end of it.'

" 'How is that? But first tell me what prayer it is.'

" 'It is the Our Father,' replied the child, 'but when I say the words Our Father who art in Heaven, I come to a stop, and can go no further.'

" 'Why so?'

" 'Because I cannot help crying with joy, when I think of these words. Is it really possible, I say to myself, that I can have God for my Father—the great God who made the beautiful sky, the bright sun, these lofty mountains and all this wonderful world? And yet I know it is true, and that the great and good God allows me to call Him Father, and that He loves me as His child. When this thought takes possession of me, I begin to cry, and can go no further with my prayer. See, father,' continued the boy, pointing with his finger to the valley below, 'there is the little hamlet where I live. It is very small and has only a few poor cot-

tages. My family is the poorest of them all, and yet,' he continued, with a look of supreme pride and content, 'I can call God my Father as truly, and be as much loved by God, as if I were a great gentleman! I am a child of God just as much as he is. This is what makes me weep for joy and gratitude, and keeps me from finishing my prayer.' "

Had we the simple faith and trust of a child, perhaps the thought of the Fatherhood of God would fill our hearts too with love and gratitude, and would bring the tears of joy into our eyes as readily.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

*"There hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not"* (John, i. 26).

MANY and tremendous, no doubt, are the surprises that await us as soon as ever we reach our heavenly home. For, immediately we pass the threshold of death and enter into eternity, the scales will drop from our eyes, and we shall at last begin to see things as they really are. How vastly different to what it is now, will then be our judgment concerning the relative value and importance of different objects! How we shall then wonder at our present blindness and folly! How astonished we shall then be at the absurd and wholly exaggerated interest we took in purely earthly and transitory things, and at our extraordinary apathy and indifference concerning those that are eternal and fundamental!

How startled we shall be, for example, when we are made to realize how immeasurably even one single degree of divine grace surpasses in

intrinsic worth all the accumulated treasures and riches of the entire material universe! And how keenly shall we reproach ourselves for our blindness and carelessness in allowing so many and such varied opportunities of increasing our scanty store to be wasted and thrown away through sheer and culpable neglect!

Or, to take a somewhat different illustration, with what speechless amazement and delight shall we, for the first time in our lives, gaze upon the exquisite beauty and dazzling splendor of our Guardian Angel, now at last revealed to us in all his celestial loveliness, and how we shall marvel to think that, during all our earthly life, we were followed, and watched over, and protected by so noble and so resplendent a prince of God's Court, without our ever showing him any marked gratitude, without perhaps even so much as adverting to what nevertheless the Church is always telling us of his constant protection and watchful care!

These are but a few specimens of many thousands of similar surprises that await us on our first entrance into the Land of Promise beyond the grave, where all shadows depart and where all things are at length made absolutely clear and manifest in God's revealing light. But, if there are many surprises, there is one which I

believe will far surpass every other in its intensity, and which will fill us, not only with wonder, but with confusion and humiliation; and that is to realize in some measure how sadly blind and insensible we have been all our lives long to the very highest and sublimest of all God's innumerable gifts to men. I refer to the gift of the Holy Eucharist, the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar.

To understand something of this, let us imagine that the present life is over and passed, and that we have just been admitted into heaven. With profound admiration we gaze around. Upon every side we behold myriads upon myriads of blessed spirits that no man can number. We mark how they rise, choir above choir, and tier above tier, as far as eye can reach. Each seems more glorious than the last, according as they approach more nearly to the dread throne of God Himself. There are angels and archangels, there are principalities and powers, there are thrones and dominations, and above all the Cherubim and the Seraphim, in their resplendent beauty and matchless glory, far surpassing anything that it is possible for us to fancy or imagine, and yet more innumerable than the stars of heaven or the sands that are heaped up on the seashore.

Yet, in spite of their inconceivable beauty, we may say that we scarcely notice them, or bestow a thought upon them. Why is this? Because there is One in their midst, who is transcendently greater than them all—One who cannot be named in the same breath, One whose glory and majesty and beauty are literally infinite and incomprehensible, and incomparably beyond that of any creature whatsoever. In fact, God is *infinitely* beautiful, and *infinite beauty cannot be communicated to another,* but belongs to God alone. As soon, therefore, as we catch a glimpse of the eternal and uncreated beauty of the Creator, we shall be so attracted by it, and so absorbed by it, that nothing else will seem worthy of our attention. Once we see God Himself visibly present, it will be as though we saw no other. For, by comparison, all mere creatures sink away into utter insignificance and are, as the Scriptures affirm, just "as though they were not, being counted as nothing." The mightiest kings and emperors are no more than the dust of His feet, for the greatest potentates of earth possess no greatness in His eyes. Even the most magnificent of the angels and archangels are but the lowly menials and obedient messengers, who wait upon Him to carry out His will. And all their dazzling beauty and glory are but the faint

and unworthy reflection of His own infinite beauty and glory, which throws all other into the shade. "Heaven is His throne," says the prophet (Is., lxvi. 1), "and the earth His footstool"; and "of His greatness there is no end." While before Him the entire world, of which we think so much, is "as the least grain of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew that falleth down upon the earth" (Wis., xi. 23). Such is the poor and utterly inadequate human description that we attempt to give of Him, who sitteth upon the Great White Throne amid a numberless host of blessed spirits, immeasurably more numerous and incalculably more beautiful than the very stars that decorate the skies.

And as we—almost beside ourselves with wonder and trembling all over with mingled feelings of awe and admiration, of joy and delight—gaze intently upon the unparalleled majesty of His unveiled countenance, what strange emotions will sweep through every fiber of our being as we come, little by little, to realize that He, the selfsame Supreme Being on whose infinite splendors even the Cherubim can scarcely gaze, was once the companion of our earthly exile, our hidden though ever-present Lord, and even the spiritual nourishment and divine Food of our souls during all the days of our

pilgrimage—yea, that it was He who dwelt beneath the wheaten veils in our tabernacles—that it was no other than that same infinite and uncreated God, mighty and terrible and greatly to be feared, who drew so close to us while we were on earth, who touched us (as it were) with His divine lips and rested on our tongue in Holy Communion, who entered as a most loving guest into the hidden sanctuary of our hearts, and made Himself a home and a dwelling-place there, whenever we offered up Holy Mass, or approached the altar-rails to receive the Bread of Angels! Yet oh, how cold and blind and indifferent we were!

Now that we are in heaven, the mere glimpse of so much glory throws us into a perfect ecstasy, sets our blood on fire, and stirs us to the very depths of our soul. But why, oh why, were we so cold and insensible, when with infinite condescension and burning charity He humbled Himself, and actually came to us under the form of bread! How could we have remained so lukewarm and distracted! How could we have dared to entertain so divine a Guest with so little reverence and with such scant preparation—and perhaps often with our soul defiled with the dust of earth and besmeared with imperfections and venial stains!

This surely is a mystery of human weakness and folly, and one greatly to be deplored. Yet alas! it is a most undeniable fact. For one reason or another, we make but little of the personal presence of the Incarnate God in our midst, and scarcely seem to realize the infinite Treasure which we possess so close at hand. "There hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not" (John, i. 20).

It is not our faith, but rather our power to realize that is at fault. We know, and have no difficulty in believing, that the small white consecrated Host holds Heaven itself within its narrow circle. We confess, without a shadow of a doubt, that, as the words of consecration are uttered, the substance of bread ceases to exist, and that in its place we have the very substance of Christ's living Body, both Flesh and Blood, and His human Soul with all its properties and faculties as well. But, since the Divinity is ever united to the Humanity, the Divine Substance is also present. Again, since God the Father and God the Holy Ghost are likewise identified with the Divine Nature, there too the Father and the Holy Ghost must be by *circumincession,* there being but one indivisible Divine Substance, and this Substance is common to all the Three Divine Persons. Thus, wherever one

Divine Person is substantially present, there likewise must be the other Two.

We gaze with reverence on the consecrated Host or Wine. With the eyes of our body, we see nothing but an appearance—*i.e.*, the appearance of bread and of wine. Our eyes do not deceive us, since the appearances (or the "accidents") of bread and of wine are indeed really there, although the substance has gone. But, impervious to the senses, and as it were hidden beneath the veils of bread and wine, are the ever-blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, together with the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ. They are there "really, truly and substantially," and therefore with all their infinite and indescribable and inconceivable beauty, sanctity, virtue, wisdom, power and majesty. Hence, we may most truly say that Heaven comes down upon earth, and enters into and dwells in our hearts, whenever we communicate sacramentally! It is a profound truth. We know it. We firmly believe it. Yet we are unmoved, unaffected, cold, and perhaps even distracted. How shall we explain such extraordinary torpor?

If an earthly king were to visit us, we would certainly bestir ourselves and show some emotion; but this is the King of kings! If a glori-

ous angel were suddenly to illuminate our humble chamber with his visible presence and to appear before us, as St. Gabriel appeared to the prophet Daniel, we would most undoubtedly fall prostrate to the ground and render him every homage. Yet, in the Blessed Sacrament, we are visited and even embraced by the dread Creator of both men and angels, and we seem scarcely able to drive away distractions! Indeed *"there hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not."*

Do we, in very truth, bring clearly home to ourselves that He whom we receive is verily God Incarnate? And that, in receiving the Holy Eucharist, we receive Him whose full possession constitutes the essential joy of heaven, and whose eternal loss is but another name for hell itself? Are we vividly and intimately conscious that it is He who actually made us, who preserves us moment by moment, to whom we owe everything, and who is infinitely more to us than father or mother, brother or sister, husband or lover can ever be?

That we believe this there is of course no doubt. But how torpid and heavy and dull is our faith! We by no means appreciate our marvelous privilege, nor do we in the least grasp the inconceivable honor that is conferred upon

us. We may be compared to men who are asleep or in a swoon, for, were we fully awake, it would be impossible to draw near to so mighty a Being with so little piety, attention and devotion.

What is the explanation of such strange and regrettable conduct? It must surely arise in great measure from the fact that we are such children of sense. If we are to be thoroughly aroused, it seems that we must be addressed through the senses. That which we can see with our own eyes, and can hear with our ears, and feel with our hands, we may indeed appreciate and esteem, but scarcely that which remains concealed, out of sight, and wholly invisible. We are far too carnal-minded easily to relish what is spiritual and supernatural, however readily we are impressed by what is material and tangible.

This is a fact well recognized by all. It is because of this that kings and emperors, and the great ones of this world, clothe themselves in ermine and cloth-of-gold, and assume all the outward trappings of royalty and power. Consider how any earthly monarch comports himself. When he appears in public, or travels in state, how careful he is to appeal to all our senses! Long before he actually comes within

sight, the air resounds with the blast of a hundred trumpets, the clashing of reverberating cymbals, and the rolling of echoing drums. Then, while our ears are deafened by the shouts and the huzzas of the noisy multitudes, our eyes are caught by the gleaming helmets and the waving plumes of the bodyguard, and by the glistening naked swords of the soldiers. And still the scene grows more and more animated, and the music and the cheers louder and louder, till at last the king himself flashes past in a gorgeous coach, and disappears in the distance in a blaze of martial glory.

In this way, our poor little human minds are impressed with a deep sense of his importance, our imaginations are set on fire, our enthusiasm is stirred, and the truth is certainly borne in upon us that, in the eyes of men at least, a king is no ordinary mortal, but one in an exceptional position, wielding extraordinary power and authority, and not to be easily ignored nor offended with impunity.

It is very much the same if we seek an audience with a crowned head. Arrangements must be made beforehand; we are ordered to appear in court dress, and have to conform to a special etiquette. Then the very grandeur of the royal palace produces its effect, as well as the guards

and attendants that watch over every gate and entrance, and the pomp and ceremony everywhere observable. In a word, an earthly king, *because he is an earthly king,* has to impress his subjects. He is obliged to make a display and to arouse attention, for otherwise who will think much of him?

But the infinite and eternal God, "by whom kings reign, and the princes of the earth exercise their power" (Prov., viii. 15-16), appeals to nothing external, but trusts entirely to faith alone. It is true that even one single tiny ray of His glory would more than suffice to eclipse all the tinsel glory of earth; yet not even that one tiny ray is suffered to escape from Him. In the Adorable Sacrament, our Lord God most effectually hides every trace of His presence, and allows nothing whatever to emerge that might suggest the tremendous reality. Faith and faith alone, is our guide. "Verily, Thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour" (Is., xlv. 15).

We leave for a moment the noisy traffic of the public street, and we enter a church. It may be poor, mean, roughly built; it may lie back in some obscure street, amid the squalor and dirt of the most dismal slums; or perhaps it is a mere log-chapel, roughly put together by un-

skilled hands in the backwoods of America, or on some lonely missionary station washed by the waters of the Pacific or the Indian Ocean.

Yet our Divine Lord is also truly there. We enter. We gaze around. We do not indeed actually see the mighty hosts of adoring angels that surround His throne. Our ears are too dull to catch the solemn "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth," resounding from the myriad lips of Cherubim and Seraphim, and breaking, like never-ending waves of golden music, against the steps of His eternal throne. We are, in a word, all unconscious of the light inaccessible, within which He dwells, and heed not the lightnings that play for ever about His sacred Person. All we notice is the tiny red lamp, swinging before a simple tabernacle door. All that actually meets the eye is, perhaps, an old woman devoutly telling her beads, while all we hear is the monotonous buzzing of the summer flies. Indeed there is nothing, absolutely nothing to startle us; nothing to arrest our attention; nothing either to excite our wonder or to stimulate our admiration; nothing but pure faith.

When Moses ventured near the burning bush, he was greatly startled by the sound of a strange voice, crying out: "Come not nigh hither; put

off the shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod., iii. 5). But here no heavenly voice is raised to upbraid us, even if we laugh and talk and forget ourselves in the presence of our Sacramental Lord. No. Here we find ourselves in the region of pure faith. Our corporal eyes cannot serve us or penetrate the mystery. If we are to be duly impressed—if we are to be filled with burning sentiments of wonder, humility, contrition, hope, confidence, and above all of love—we must open wide the eyes of our soul, and arouse our sleeping faith, for in that way alone shall we learn that we are indeed standing on holy ground, and at the very feet of the world's Redeemer, our Judge to come, and (if saved) "our eternal Reward exceeding great"—yes, before Him, mighty and terrible, at whose glance the mountains melt like wax, the wicked flee, and hell trembles to its very center.

"Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gen., xxviii. 16). Alas! how little conscious we are of the most marvelous gifts of God! Who will help us to shake off this lamentable drowsiness, and teach us to open our eyes to a fuller appreciation of so great and so glorious a truth? Let us make some attempt, at all events, to conquer our weakness, to triumph

over the restrictions of mere sense, and to see things as they really are.

Persons sometimes ask what they must do in order to dispose themselves to receive the Blessed Sacrament worthily, and how they are to throw themselves into a fitting state of mind. Our answer is: All you need do is to realize as vividly as possible, *first,* who God is, and *then* to bear in mind that Jesus Christ, whom you receive, is as truly the eternal and uncreated God as He is truly man. Put before you His infinite majesty and all His divine perfections. Do this: do it thoroughly, and, if you succeed in this, rest assured that this of itself will be enough to arrest all wandering thoughts, rivet attention, excite profound reverence, inspire the utmost confidence, call forth sentiments of humility, and set the heart on fire with flames of the most passionate and ardent love.

*Quod non capis, quod non vides,*
*Animosa firmat* fides,
*Præter rerum ordinem.*
*Sub diversis speciebus,*
*Signis tantum, et non rebus,*
*Latent res eximiæ.*
*Caro cibus, sanguis potus,*
*Manet tamen Christus totus*
*Sub utraque specie.*

# CHAPTER XXXVIII

## THE GLORIOUS ANGELS OF GOD

*Custodes hominum psallimus Angelos*
*Naturæ fragili quos Pater addidit*
*Cœlestis comites, insidiantibus*
*Ne succumberet hostibus.*

AS, in many ways, priests are more closely united to God than other Christians, and share more fully in His power and authority, so priests more than any others should feel a deeper interest and find a greater delight in contemplating the wondrous works of His hands. "The heavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge" (Ps., xviii. 1-2). Yet how few of us pause to listen to the voice of nature, as it proclaims the beauty, the power and the wisdom of its infinite Creator!

If we were a little more spiritually minded, we would, no doubt, be constantly reading and studying the marvelous book of nature which lies wide open before us upon every side, and

would begin, like the Saints, to acquire an ever-increasing and more intimate knowledge of God's divine attributes. "For," as St. Paul reminds us, "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world *are clearly seen,* being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and divinity" (Rom., i. 20).

But, in the present chapter, we would say a few words concerning not His visible, but rather one of His still more wonderful invisible works —a work which is alas! seldom thought of, and but little heeded. We refer to the angelic spirits who are so closely associated with us, and who should be constantly in our thoughts.

By nature they are indeed far superior to ourselves, and possess qualities and attributes to which we can lay no claim. So great is their excellence and their beauty that theologians assure us that, even were all the loveliness and beauty of all men united and concentrated in one individual, it would be as nothing at all compared to the beauty to be found in a single Angel. "Compared with the angelical, all human perfection is as nothing, or as a mere point compared to the immensity of the heavens," writes the theologian, Leonardus Lessius. We may say much the same of their knowledge. They look upon the face of God, and there learn

more than is given to the whole race of man on earth to know. The most learned and deepest philosopher that ever aroused the admiration of his contemporaries, is but a simpleton and an ignoramus when compared to the very least of the angelic host.

And, if in beauty and wisdom they so far exceed ourselves, so do they surpass us in strength and power. Of this fact we have many remarkable illustrations in the inspired pages. Thus, to take a single instance, when the chosen people of God were fighting against the Assyrians and stood in some danger owing to the immense number of the enemy, God sent an Angel, who single-handed slew in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand of their armed men (IV Kings, xix. 35), and so enabled Ezechias to gain a great victory. Lord Byron commemorates the event in a stirring poem, from which we cite the following lines:

Like the leaves of the forest, when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest, when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still.

Considering their power and majesty, it is not surprising that their presence, when perceived, inspires not only reverence but even the most intense fear. Thus Daniel, though a great prophet and a saint, no sooner beheld the Angel Gabriel than he fell to the earth, and "lay in consternation upon his face." His courage departed from him, and "there remained no strength in him, and the appearance of his countenance was changed, and he fainted away" (Dan., x. 8).

However, in spite of their celestial splendor and exalted position, the Holy Angels not only regard us with interest and deep affection, but they are constantly rendering us the greatest services and assisting in our spiritual advancement in a thousand ways. The Holy Scriptures are full of instances of the way in which they are employed by God to carry out the merciful designs of His divine providence, so that we should not look upon them as strangers, but rather as most dear friends, associates, and intimates.

Their connection with man and his trials becomes apparent as soon as we open the Bible. Thus, for instance, we read in the very opening book how God "placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubims, and a flaming sword, turn-

ing every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life" (Gen., iii. 24). Then we also read, in another place, how an Angel appeared to Zachary, and promised him a son in his old age: "Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard. Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." How, six months later, the Angel Gabriel appeared to our Blessed Lady, and told her she was to be the Mother of God. Further, it was an Angel that came to comfort and to reassure St. Joseph in his consternation and said to him: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." It was an Angel, too, who appeared to Philip, the deacon, and told him where to go. Indeed, we have many instances of their coming to the aid of persons in danger or distress. Thus, Angels protected Lot and his family at the burning of the wicked cities, and it was only because Lot's wife disregarded their warning that she perished. They also protected the three young men, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, who were thrown into the "seven times heated" furnace by the order of King Nabuchodonozor. For the Scripture narrates how the Angel of the Lord went down with the three holy youths into the furnace, and

protected them so that not a hair of their heads was even singed. The Angels also protected Daniel from the fury of the seven hungry lions, when he was cast into their den by command of the King of Babylon, who expected him to be torn to pieces almost before he reached the ground. They did even more, for they provided him with food while he remained locked up with these ferocious beasts. It is described in the Bible in this way: "At that time, there was in Judea a prophet called Habacuc, who carried food to the field for the reapers. Now the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said: 'Carry thy dinner to Daniel, who is in the lions' den at Babylon.' Habacuc replied: 'I never saw Babylon, nor do I know the den.' Then the Angel took him by the hair of his head, and carried him to Babylon, and placed him over the den of lions. And Habacuc called to Daniel: 'Thou servant of God, take the dinner that God hath sent thee.' Daniel exclaimed: 'Thou hast remembered me, O God, and Thou hast not forsaken them that love Thee.' Having provided Daniel with food, the Angel of the Lord carried Habacuc back to his own place" (cfr. Dan., xiv, 32-38). If we would learn the true character of the Angels and their readiness to come to our assistance at all times,

we have but to recall their intimate intercourse with such well-known Biblical characters as Tobias and Job, as well as with others, like Judith, who was singularly protected from great and imminent danger by Angels. This she herself confessed, saying: "God's Angel hath been my keeper, both going hence, and abiding there, and returning from thence hither" (Jud., xiii. 20).

We also have a wonderful account of the manner in which Angels assisted Judas Machabeus in his fight against the armies of the Syrian kings. Many other accounts of the doings of Angels are to be met with in the inspired pages of Holy Scripture, such as the marvelous and beautiful vision accorded to Jacob after his flight from the anger of his brother and during his sleep in the desert. In this vision he saw a ladder standing upon the earth and reaching up even to heaven, while bright and glorious Angels kept ascending and descending upon it.

To take quite another instance, which occured in Christian times. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how, in answer to the united prayers of the early Church, St. Peter was rescued from prison by an Angel. The night before he was to be executed, he had to sleep bound with two iron chains between two soldiers, while other soldiers kept watch at the door of the

prison. But, at dead of night, an Angel appeared before him, and struck Peter on the side and awakened him, saying: "Arise quickly"; he did so, and the chains fell from off his hands. Then the Angel spoke to him: "Gird thyself, and put on thy sandals, and follow me." He did all that he was told to do, and soon found himself once again at freedom. At first Peter feared it might be but a dream, but "coming to himself he exclaimed: 'Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath *sent His Angel,* and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.'" There are many other instances recorded in the pages of the Bible of angelic intervention and assistance, but the few we have referred to are more than enough to enable us to see how wonderful and how intimate is the intercourse between ourselves and the blessed spirits above, and how ready they are to aid us in all our necessities.

There are two remarkable facts regarding the blessed Angels that must strike the imagination and fill the mind with wonder and admiration. The first is their immense *number,* and the second is their astounding *variety.*

Just think of the many hundreds of millions of human beings actually on this earth alone.

Now if, as we all believe, every man, woman and child is accompanied by an Angel Guardian, it follows that there must be far more than a thousand million Angels now engaged in the service of man, for statisticians inform us that the human race itself numbers about 1,500,000,000. And, as it is generally thought that the same Angel is never appointed to guard more than one immortal soul, it follows that other millions of Angels exist who never have acted as guardians to all the men, women and children who have preceded those who are now working out their salvation on earth.

Then, besides those who act as Guardian Angels, there are vast multitudes who stand before the face of God, impatient to do His will. Occasionally some hint of this is given us in Holy Scripture, as, for instance in Daniel, where we read: "Thousands of thousands minister to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stand before Him" (vii. 10).

Now, as to their number. It is the opinion of theologians that the number of the Angels is exceedingly vast. St. Thomas teaches, in common with many others, that the more perfect a creature is, the larger is the number of them that God creates (*Quanto aliqua sunt magis perfecta, tanto in majori excessu creata sunt*).

Hence, F. C. Billuart, commenting on St. Thomas, writes: "Ergo rationabile est quod substantiæ immateriales, utpote entia perfectiora, *excedant quasi incomparabiliter* substantiarum materialium" (I, art. II, p. 5).

The inspired Word of God speaks of no less than nine classes or choirs of Angels. These have been divided into three hierarchies: the first is composed of the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and the Thrones; the second is made up of the Dominations, the Virtues, and the Powers; and the third consists of the Principalities, the Archangels, and the simple Angels. And *each* of these nine choirs is thought to contain an immense multitude of individuals that no man can number.

But what is yet more wonderful than the portentous number of these celestial spirits, is their extraordinary variety. Each individual is a work of God, and reflects something of His infinite beauty. Each Angel is exceedingly lovely and of exquisite mold, and surpasses anything we have ever seen or even imagined. Yet the marvelous thing is that each is essentially different. Out of the vast host, that no man can number, there are *no two alike,* but every single individual possesses a grace and an elegance and

a splendor entirely its own.[1] For, in creating the Angels, God never repeats Himself, nor produces the selfsame charm in any two of their number. So that we might pass from the contemplation of one to another, and find an entirely fresh beauty and magnificence in each. It may be objected that, even in man, there is always a difference, and that no two men even are entirely alike. But the difference between Angel and Angel is not in any sense like the slight differences between man and man. Probably no two men are absolutely alike; and, however closely one man may resemble another, we may always discover some slight difference, so that we are always able to distinguish between them. Yet they are all alike, inasmuch as they are all of the same species. But this is not so in the case of the Angels. Though all Angels are of the same genus, yet no two Angels are of the same species. In making this startling statement, we are but following the teaching of the

[1] As the human race is composed of men with material bodies as well as souls, we naturally expect a common basis of structure and function, owing to the fact of transmission by generation from a common ancestry. Hence, that, within certain limits, men should be like one another and present no specific differences, was only to be expected. It was quite otherwise in a world of pure spirits, in which there is no heredity and no modification of environment. —J. S. V.

prince of theologians, St. Thomas, who proves that, however innumerable the Angels may be, each individual must be a distinct species of himself (*impossibile est esse duos angelos unius speciei*).

His thought may be more readily brought home to us by an example. Thus, take such a familiar object as a rose. How great is their variety! We may have roses red, and roses white, roses yellow and roses pink, roses wild and roses cultivated, and moss-roses and hedge-roses, and so on. There is the same sort of difference between them as we find between man and man, because, just as all men are of one and the same species, so all varieties of roses are of the one same species.

With the Angels it is quite otherwise. Instead of varieties of the one species, each individual is a particular species in himself. For, to quote St. Thomas again: "Perfectio naturæ angelicæ requirit multiplicationem specierum, non autem multiplicationem individuorum una specie." Hence, to find a satisfactory analogy, we must not select any particular species of flower and consider the many varieties of the one species, but we must consider the far greater differences which are to be found between one species of flower and all other

species. In short, the differences existing between one Angel and another are nothing like the differences between one rose and another: they are rather like the differences between one species of flower and an altogether separate species. Just as, under the one *genus* Flower, we have a vast number of totally different and distinct species of flowers, so under the one *genus* Angel we have a still vaster number of distinct species of spiritual beings. So that Angel differs from Angel, not as rose differs from rose, but rather as rose differs from lily, and as lily differs from tulip, and as tulip differs from chrysanthemum, and chrysanthemum from geranium and sweet-pea, and so on with every separate species in turn. The fact is, God being infinitely beautiful, no creature can reflect more than an infinitesimal fraction of His beauty; and, even though each of the unnumbered Angels reflects a *different* portion, there will still be but a very insignificant portion of His beauty reflected, even by the entire heavenly host united. But, since each one mirrors forth some different phase or aspect of God's infinite beauty, each will be a new joy and delight to gaze upon, and will fill us with a fresh view as it were of the great Creator.

When we bear in mind that these vast myriads

of highly gifted and exquisite spirits are one day to be our companions and our fellow-citizens in our eternal home above, we should take the keenest interest in learning all that we can about them, and should frequently have recourse to them in all our trials, difficulties and temptations. The great Saints and servants of God constantly invoked them, and missionary and apostolic men are found again and again begging the spiritual assistance of the Guardian Angels for those whom they were trying to convert. Take a single instance of what I mean. In reading the life of St. Ignatius, we are told how one of his companions, named Peter Favre, "had special affection for the ministering Angels, whose work he emulated on earth. He invoked the Guardian Angel of each town he entered, and of each person he addressed in talk, that the tutelary spirit might guide him to the fit word" (Francis Thompson, "Life of St. Ignatius," 249).

It is surprising that this custom is not more common. When we think of the power of the Angels, their zeal for God's glory, and their immense love of souls, we should expect no earnest priest to neglect to secure their valuable coöperation in his daily ministrations. Let us, at all events, not neglect their aid, nor ever fail

to call upon them when striving to win souls to God. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" (Heb., i. 14.) Then let us make a generous use of their splendid coöperation, and invite them upon every occasion to help us in saving and sanctifying the multitudes for whom Christ delivered Himself up to the ignominious death of the cross. If we make a point of doing so, our work will become more fruitful, and we shall receive a greater blessing from Him, who has called us to be the "light of the world" and the "salt of the earth." To Him be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### ON THE MERIT OF THE MOST ORDINARY ACTIONS

*"All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Col., iii. 17).

THERE are three different views regarding the condition of man in this world. One view is that man is altogether good and perfect, in so far as his origin and nature are concerned: those who embrace this view deny the supernatural order, refuse to acknowledge sin and all its unhappy consequences, and live in a fool's paradise. The second view goes to the opposite extreme, and would persuade us that, though man was created good, yet original sin has so utterly ruined his whole nature that now there is nothing of good in it, and his entire being is exclusively evil.

Besides these two false views there is the true view, held by the infallible Church of God, which teaches us that God created man good

and upright, but that, being tempted by the subtle cunning of the devil, he fell into sin, and so forfeited sanctifying grace and the supernatural end for which he was created. Now, the Church teaches that, though much of this was restored to him by the infinite compassion of God, there is still left within him inordinate concupiscence, dangerous passions, and sinful inclinations. Hence arises the need of self-mastery, self-denial, self-discipline, and in a word mortification.

Man's life is a battle, a warfare, an endless conflict (cfr. Job, vii. 1). We have to fight: but what is it precisely that we must attack and destroy? It cannot be our nature itself, for we did not create it, and it belongs to God. In fact, we have to use it, and it is by the proper use of it that we are to attain eternal life. From this it follows that the faculties of our nature are not to be destroyed, but rather carefully trained and brought into play. Indeed, we cannot live or acquire merit without them. Hence it is evident that it is not our passions, *in themselves*, that we have to repress and restrain, since they are in themselves good, and they *become* evil only through being made to serve an evil purpose. To take an illustration, a man feels himself to be full of ambition. He is

burning to advance, to excel in his business, and to become rich and powerful. He wishes to win the approval of his government, and to receive some honor or distinction at its hands. Is this strong and all-ruling ambition wrong? Must he crush it? Must he root it out of his heart and fling it from him?

In answering this question, we must be careful to distinguish between ambition, *considered in itself,* and the end to which it is applied. The passion considered in itself is noble and excellent, only it must be applied to what is worthy of it. What is worthy may be learned from the inspired words of the Apostle: "Be ambitious (or zealous) for the better gifts" (*Æmulamini autem charismata meliora,* I Cor., xii. 31); "be zealous for spiritual gifts" (*Æmulamini spiritualia,* I Cor., xiv. 1). Here G. Estius ("Commentary," p. 653) adds: "By the term 'be zealous,' the Apostle as it were exhorts them to acquire, *not those gifts which are greater*—that is, more admirable—*in the judgment of the multitude,* but those which are more useful in the service of the Church."

To waste our time and to prostitute our highest faculties in striving to acquire perishable goods or to obtain some purely earthly distinction, would be shameful and unworthy of one

who might, by guiding his energies aright, secure eternal goods and the ineffable honors and distinctions that God so readily bestows upon those who serve Him faithfully. However, it is so very much easier to turn a force in another direction than to destroy it altogether—far easier to re-direct than to annihilate it. A powerful stream of water, if misdirected, may do endless damage to crops and fields, but, when properly controlled, may irrigate an entire country. The electricity contained in flashes of lightning may, during a storm, bring death and destruction, but, if it could be properly guided and mastered, might drive an engine or light a street. So is it with the latent powers within us.

Bearing this important principle in view, I would say to the ambitious: "Do not destroy that passion. Be ambitious still. The more ambitious you are the better, provided always it be *for the better things*. Ambition is a vice and to be resisted, if it seeks what is low, degrading, and unworthy of an immortal soul. But, if directed towards what is heavenly, eternal and divine, it will be a virtue and of the very greatest service, and should be cultivated and encouraged."

To take another example, here is a man who

feels himself attracted by the glamor and witchery of riches. He is bent on becoming enormously wealthy. His passion is to add to his fortune, to increase his possessions, and to become a millionaire. He spares neither time nor trouble in his efforts to grow rich.

Why is this wrong? Because he is prostituting his God-given talents on what is contemptible and wholly unworthy of one who is heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. It is as though a king's son, a noble prince of the royal blood, should concentrate his thoughts and devote all his time and energies in gathering rags and collecting refuse in order to eke out a few pence, forgetting his high calling and that he is heir to a throne.

How are we to deal with this strong thirst for riches? Must we uproot it? Destroy every vestige of it? No, we should not even weaken or diminish it. All that is necessary is to direct it to its proper and legitimate end. To seek riches is just and right and to be encouraged, but always provided that they be *real* riches, *true* riches, *lasting* riches. In sooth, we are made to be rich and wealthy and to abound in all good things, and it is during our present life that we are given the power to grow more and more rich in graces and merits, which alone can

secure for us real and eternal treasures. Consider the divine invitation of our Blessed Lord. He actually counsels and encourages us to seek riches, and so clearly approves of this thirst for wealth. "Lay up to yourselves treasures," He says. He even commands us to lay up treasures—but only such treasures as are worth having, for He is careful to add: "in Heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal" (Matt., vi. 20). It is only when this passion is directed to perishable and corruptible riches, that He justly and firmly condemns it. "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal" (*ibid.*, vi. 19).

If we realized things as they really are, it would be most humiliating for us to note the restless zeal and the untiring energy and the franctic struggle that so many worldlings make to acquire purely worldly wealth, while we are doing little or nothing for the sake of what is infinitely more precious. Their industry, keenness, and unflagging determination to turn every opportunity to account, and to neglect no chance that comes in their way of adding yet more to a fortune already perhaps far beyond their needs, should indeed teach us a lesson, and stir us up to

exert ourselves more seriously to win the infinitely more valuable treasures of Heaven. How accurately does our Lord describe the situation, when He says: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke, xvi. 8).

Now, there are many strong reasons why we should strive after eternal rather than after temporal riches. I will confine myself to the three chief:

(1) Because any inordinate struggle after perishable goods is condemned by God, and may very easily lead to the commission of many sins, whereas our efforts to acquire lasting goods, so far from being condemned by God, is encouraged by and is pleasing to Him;

(2) Because perishable goods are of no real and enduring value as compared to imperishable goods, and can never really bear any comparison with them. They are also a great danger. "Hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. xix. 23);

(3) Because, however much we may exert ourselves to acquire this world's goods, we can never be at all sure that our most determined efforts will lead to success, whereas we know with the unerring certainty of divine faith that we are positively certain to grow spiritually

rich, provided only that we exert ourselves in the right way.

Sad experience proves that a man may spend his whole life and devote all his energies in the service of the world, and yet die a pauper in the workhouse. Whereas any one, however simple and however devoid of worldly prudence and wisdom, may, if he is in earnest, easily gather for himself untold spiritual riches without the slightest risk of failure.

Let us weigh these three reasons carefully, in the presence of God and in the light of eternity. Each one, taken singly, is exceedingly strong. But their united force should prove irresistible to any priest whose reason is sound, and whose faith is vivid.

To encourage ourselves to be "ambitious for the better gifts," it will be well here to consider that Almighty God not only urges us to lay up for ourselves priceless treasures in Heaven, but that He also supplies us with the most powerful and the most abundant means of carrying out His counsel. The simple fact is, that we may easily acquire treasure after treasure, and continue to do so all our lives long, if we are at all zealous and ready to fulfill the simple conditions.

Let us just consider what these conditions are.

In the first place, we must be in a state of grace. Unless we are united to God by charity, it is impossible for us to merit anything condignly. St. Paul puts this truth before us in the most striking manner: "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (I Cor., xiii. 3). So that a man remains wholly incapable of gaining any condign merit so long as his soul is stained by deadly sin.

The second condition of gaining supernatural merit is a pure and upright intention. Far more depends upon the intention than some of us are inclined to imagine. The very same action in fact may be either good, or bad, or indifferent, according to the nature of the intention. Thus, to take an example, three men may each bestow an alms upon a poor beggar. The amount given may be exactly the same. But the first man is moved by his desire to please God, and to obey Him who bids us love one another. The second man, though he gives the same alms, does so out of ostentation, and solely that he may win the esteem of men. The third acts from a purely natural feeling of sympathy and compassion, and without any thought of God or duty. What is the result? The first

has exercised real virtue, and gained an increase of grace. The second, so far from exercising virtue, has been guilty of sin, and merited not grace but punishment. This third man has performed a naturally good work, but not a supernatural one, nor one that can offer any claim to a supernatural reward. This shows us how very careful we should be to purify our intention, and how much we shall lose if we act without thought and reflection.

The third condition is that we should still be pilgrims on earth, for every opportunity of meriting ceases forever so soon as we wing our flight to another world.

Fourthly, we must of course be free agents, and not acting under compulsion, nor while in a state of unconsciousness.

Fifthly, and lastly, the act must be either good in itself, or at all events indifferent and not intrinsically bad.

If these easy conditions be fulfilled, there is no act, however trivial or however unimportant, which may not be made a means of acquiring greater and greater merit. Hence, St. Paul urges us to turn every act to account, saying: "Whether you eat or drink, or *whatsoever else you do,* do all to the glory of God" (I Cor., x. 31).

Just consider what a very wide field is thus opened out before us, and how boundless are the opportunities afforded the zealous priest of literally "heaping up for himself treasures in heaven." Thus, not only Mass, prayers, meditation, the administration of the Sacraments, alms, mortifications and other spiritual works, but even such ordinary and commonplace actions as eating, drinking, resting, sleeping, and indulging in lawful amusements and relaxations, may also be turned into occasions of supernatural merit, if only the above conditions be complied with.

Now, considering that by far the greater portion of our lives is taken up with such indifferent and necessary occupations, we ought to be filled with gratitude to God, who has put within our reach such golden opportunities. We have only to seize every occasion as it arises, and to make the most of it, in order to see how rapidly our merits will increase in the course of years. If men of the world could make money as easily as we can "coin money for Heaven," how innumerable would be the millionaires! Would they show the indifference and the carelessness in regard to their temporal profits that we show in regard to our spiritual and eternal gains?

Most decidedly not; for they are far "wiser in their generation than the children of light."

While much might be said upon this important subject, enough, I trust, has been said to enable the reader to realize what magnificent prospects are before him, and how completely within his reach are the only treasures really worth having. Let him thank God for such unspeakable generosity, and resolve to avail himself of the splendid opportunities of securing for himself a glorious and magnificent eternity, full of supernatural treasures.

# CHAPTER XL

## ON THE END OF CREATURES

*"For all things are yours whether it be . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come . . . ; for you are Christ's"* (I Cor., iii. 22-23).

MANY truths have been revealed to us which are by no means self-evident. There are great and important dealings of God with us, His creatures, which are hard to realize, and which experience seems—though *only seems*—to contradict. One of these is the purpose that creatures are intended by God to serve, and the help they are destined by God to render to us in our efforts to please Him and to save our souls.

A great painter, if he is to succeed in his art, must surround himself with all the necessary implements and appliances of his work. He must have the brushes, the oils, the paints, the palettes, the canvas, and so forth. If he is painting some great celebrity, he has to observe the utmost care in the selection of his colors, and to choose not the brightest nor the most conspicu-

ous pigments, but those only that will best reproduce on the canvas the portrait he is asked to paint, or otherwise he will fail utterly. Or to take a somewhat different example. A skilled physician must possess at his command an immense variety of drugs, medicines, powders, pills, and plasters, and his art is to make a *wise choice* of them according to the nature and the special character of the sickness which he is called upon to cure. The fame of the painter or the physician will depend upon the use made of the various pigments or medicines: if the painter rejects a suitable color because it is dull and unattractive, or if the physician will not prescribe a medicine because it is disagreeable or bitter, they will both misuse their opportunities, and be no credit to their profession.

Now, in a somewhat analogous manner, God surrounds us with an immense number and a prodigious variety of different creatures, and He has so ordered things that, not only our holiness, but even our salvation depends upon the wise and proper use we make of them. Let me observe at the outset that, by "creatures," I mean everything that is not God. I include such things as troubles, temptations, likes and dislikes, and all that exists outside God.

Wonderful as it may appear at first sight, it

is yet true that, of all these different creatures, there is not one that cannot help us in some way or another. In His unspeakable wisdom, power and love, God has so arranged that everything around us may be made a means of advance, if only we deal with it aright. In some cases it may be by using it, and in other cases by abstaining from its use. But, in one way or another, it may be made to serve us, if we know how to act towards it. St. Paul is most explicit on this point: "All things work together unto good, to such as, according to His purpose, are called to be saints" (Rom., viii. 28). One might suppose that, if one thing is a help to us, the very opposite would be a hindrance. But this is not so. For *everything* may be turned to good account. Take two opposites: for instance, riches on the one hand and its contrary, poverty, on the other. Both may serve us, but in a different way. If I am enormously rich, I can then gain great merit by my generous donations to those in distress and by erecting hospitals, building churches, and so forth. If, on the contrary, I am penniless, and have to work hard to keep the wolf from the door, I can still merit, but in a different way, *viz.*, by offering up to God my toil and my weariness, and the hunger and thirst which I am often unable to sat-

isfy. So again, what are so unlike each other as robust health and incurable sickness? Yet one will bring heaven within reach just as faithfully as the other, although not in the same way. If healthy and strong, I may become a great missionary like St. Francis Xavier; if confined to my bed by some painful and incurable disease, I may exercise the heroic patience and conformity to God's will so strikingly illustrated by holy Job on his dung-hill, and in either case become a saint. In short, it matters nothing at all what my life and duties, my circumstances and surroundings may be. *Whatever* I am, and *wherever* I am, I have always an opportunity of becoming holy, if I really have the ambition.

But let us consider some of the more manifest and general ways in which creatures aid us in our efforts to draw nearer to God. In the *first* place, creatures prove the existence of God. This point need not detain us long, for it is enough to quote the inspired words of St. Paul, who writes: "God hath manifested Himself in the creation. For the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and divinity: so that they [*i.e.*, who deny His existence] are inexcusable" (Rom., i. 19-20).

In the *second* place, creatures manifest God's attributes, such as His power, His wisdom, His goodness, and so on, and thus enable us to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to obey Him. We have sufficiently illustrated this in our chapters on "The Infinite Beauty of God," "The Infinite Power of God," and "The Infinite Goodness and Love of God." To develop this point would only be to repeat what we have already said.

So we may pass this by and point to a *third* purpose which creatures are intended to serve: and that is to draw our thoughts towards God, or, in a word, simply to remind us of Him. Had we preserved our original innocence, everything around us would naturally have spoken to us of God. We would then have detected traces of His beauty in all the works of His hands. What old Dr. Johnson said of the well-known writer, Goldsmith: *Nihil erat quod non tetigit, nihil quod tetigit non ornavit,* though an exaggeration in his case, might be asserted with absolute truth concerning God. His hands have made everything, and on everything He has left traces of His wisdom and His beauty. Of this we are reminded by holy David: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands" (Ps., xviii.

1). "Let all Thy works, O Lord, praise Thee. They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and shall tell of Thy power" (Ps., cxliv. 10-11). The Saints were ever sensible of this truth. They treated the earth as a book in which they could always read something new about God. Their hearts were so attuned that they easily vibrated in response to every invitation. Everything made them think of Him. At the sight of the measureless expanse of ocean, without (so far as eye could see) shore or limit, they thought of His infinite immensity. When living amid the troubles and trials and anxieties of earth, they would on a clear night look up to the heavens, and contemplate the perfect calm and serenity of the myriads of tranquil stars shining so peacefully above the restless turmoil and agitation of the world. And their minds would be filled with the thought of the perfect calm and imperturbable mind of God. And, just as the sight of the gorgeous sun sinking in a tropical sea, setting the whole of the heavens in a blaze, and converting the vast ocean into liquid gold, aroused within them faint images of His infinite splendor and unrivaled glory, so the contemplation of some exquisite landscape or seascape would awaken thoughts of His loveliness and of His beauty. In one of her letters,

St. Teresa opens out her mind, and tells us: "It was a great help to me to look on fields, water and flowers. For in them I saw traces of the Creator. I mean that the sight of these things was as a book to me: it roused me, made me recollected, and reminded me of my ingratitude and of my sins" ("Life," p. 60). And this would, no doubt, be the natural effect on all of us, if we possessed the purity and the sanctity of St. Teresa. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt., v. 8), not only in the next life, but to a wonderful extent even in the visible creation, which is His mirror. But alas! we are not all so spotless. Indeed Father T. Bridgett, C.SS.R., reminds us with too much truth:

> There are, who in the vault of Heaven
> See naught but clouds and sky;
> And, where imperial oceans spread,
> Mere rolling waves descry.
> But poets true to nobler gifts,
> And to their Author true,
> *In all things grand, in all things sweet,*
> *The God of nature view.*
> —(See "Life," p. 185.)

Then there is a *fourth* and quite another way in which creatures are designed to help, and that is by becoming an object-lesson to us. Our one

paramount duty is to obey God, to carry out His will in all things. Now in that matter creatures set us a splendid example. We look around, and, wherever our eye falls, we find except in man the most perfect obedience. Everything acts exactly as God wills. Order is heaven's first law. On sea and on land, among animate and inanimate creatures, God's will is perfectly carried out. The sun rises and sets at the appointed time. The tides ebb and flow exactly according to rule. The earth traveling at an appointed rate around the sun, gives us Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn in due season, and by its regular motion around its own axis it divides the night and the day, so that we can foretell to a second when on any date the day will begin, and when night will set in.

The same obedience is found in both the vegetable and the animal kingdoms. Every creature lives and acts as God designed. Every bird and every beast follows, with unerring instinct, the life and conduct predetermined by God, and brings forth its young, and feeds and cares for them with extraordinary fidelity. The bird builds its nests, the spider weaves and spreads its webs, and the bee gathers and stores up its honey, with absolute regularity yet uninfluenced by threats of penalties or fear of the punish-

ments awaiting evildoers. Every tree and shrub grows and develops and yields its flowers and its fruit, its own peculiarly shaped leaves and blossoms, exactly as God intended it should. Amid this complete and universal order and harmony, man also ought to find it easy to conform his will to the commands of God and to do His bidding. But, even with this continual lesson being taught him and with this magnificent example ever before his eyes, man refuses to yield up his will to his Heavenly Father: in fact, man is the only rebel, the only violator of God's law, the one spoilt child of disobedience, and the one sordid blot on an otherwise perfect picture.

But enough of this sad anomaly. Let us now consider a *fifth* way in which creatures should set our hearts on fire with the love of God. We know, even amongst ourselves, how we delight to show our affection and our regard for another by bestowing presents upon him. So soon as ever a strong friendship springs up between two young people, especially if one be rich and the other poor, the rich will delight in sending gifts of all kinds to the loved one. In this way, he will be constantly giving indications of his tender feelings, and the recipient will see and recognize in every gift a fresh proof of his love, and will

be stirred to love him more ardently in return.

If this is found, in an extremely faint way, in the relation of man with man, it is seen—by all those who are not stone-blind—in a most marked and unmistakable way in God's dealing with us. God loves us. And, because of His love, He is perpetually conferring His gifts and His graces upon us with a most lavish hand. The misfortune is that we are so insensible to His gifts! We use them, but do not trouble to think from whom they come. He has given us all that we are and all that we have. Our life, our power of motion, our five senses, our soul, with all its wonderful faculties and powers, are all without exception from Him. The air we breathe, the sun that cheers and illuminates us, the very ground upon which we tread, are His gifts. Our friends and dearest relations, our possessions, our pleasures, our amusements and recreations, and every conceivable thing that we use, that ministers to our happiness, or that is a source of pleasure or delight—such as the scent of flowers, the music of birds, the exquisite flavors of fruits in their infinite variety, the beauty of country scenes, the splendor of the midnight skies, and many other things too numerous to specify—are all without exception tokens of His love and signs of His goodness,

and should be recognized as such. It is true that we enjoy all these gifts, and derive a very real pleasure from them, but in many cases they fail to excite our gratitude or to enkindle our love, because, like senseless and thoughtless children, we never pause to reflect from whom they come, or to whose fatherly solicitude they are due. We use them, we find delight in them, but we show little or no gratitude to the divine Giver, and our hearts, which should be bursting with gratitude and wonder at so much generosity, remain cold, indifferent and irresponsive.

There is a *sixth* way in which creatures may help us to attain the great end for which we have been made. And that is by affording us many and admirable opportunities for exercising a variety of virtues. We here refer to such creatures as sickness, delicate and feeble health, deformity of body, and disease, as well as to disagreeable work, uncongenial companions and associates, unhealthful and sordid surroundings, a cold, damp, and foggy climate, and a vast number of other trying circumstances to which we may be exposed. Now, these things will serve us just as faithfully, and will promote our spiritual interests quite as certainly as other more agreeable creatures, *if only we will use them aright.* How can such things help us?

By exercising our patience, by supplying us with splendid opportunities of conforming our wills to the will of God even under difficulties, and by supplying us with trials, tribulations, and crosses which we may offer up in satisfaction for our sins, thereby either shortening or else doing away altogether with the punishment due to us in Purgatory. In the service of God, *all* may be turned to account.

In addition to the above, there still remains another class of creatures, different from yet akin to them, which we have not yet mentioned but which must not be passed over, for they are closely and intimately concerned with our spiritual training. We refer to the actual temptations to sin, caused by the devil, the world and the flesh. At first glance, these things may seem to be a danger and nothing else, but even temptations, when resisted and overcome, are found to be one of the most powerful aids to sanctity. So much is this so that the Apostle St. James (i. 12) tells us: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him." The *seventh* way, therefore, in which creatures may help us to sanctify our souls, is when they approach us in the form of temptation.

The Saints have found yet another, or *eighth* way in which creatures may help them to love God more, and to inflame their souls with a yet greater longing for the possession of Him and for the world to come. They have, that is to say, allowed their minds to dwell with wonder and admiration on the beauty and the splendor of this world, and have allowed themselves to feel the sweetness and the attractiveness of creatures, so that by contrast they might realize more fully the infinitely greater beauty and attractiveness of the invisible and eternal things of God. It is only after experiencing to some extent the beauty of earth that one can exclaim with St. Ignatius: *Quam sordet tellus dum cælum intueor!* Or that one can reason like St. Augustine, and say: "If God bestows such innumerable and such various gifts *here on earth* to His friends and enemies alike, how much greater and more innumerable, sweet, and delicious must be the gifts He will bestow on His friends *in Heaven.* If there are so many enjoyments in the *days of tears,* how many will there be in the *days of the nuptials?* If so many pleasures are to be found in the *prison,* how many will there be in the *land of perfect freedom!*" ("Soliloquia ad Deum," xxi.) Well may St. Paul cry out: "I reckon that the suf-

ferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come" (Rom., viii. 18).

*Ninthly,* creatures may serve us in yet another manner. We are told by the Holy Spirit Himself, speaking through St. Paul, that "by sin death entered into the world" (Rom., v. 12). And, if death, then also all that leads to death —all the disease, the sickness, and the agonies that end in death—must be attributed to sin. Hence, the Saints were led to realize more and more vividly the gravity of sin by contemplating the universal suffering of sinners all the world over. They invite one to pass through the great hospitals and to witness the innumerable ailments from which the inmates are suffering. They see some writhing from the dreadful effects of cancer, others tormented by terrific fever, others unable to draw their breath as they die from some incurable disease of the respiratory organs, others expiring from dreadful wounds or from some appalling accident. And in every case they see what is the direct or indirect effect of sin. So again they ask us to accompany them to the battlefields, and to count the millions of the dead and the dying lying about in ghastly heaps, unattended and uncared for; or to go to the scene of some frightful earthquake and contemplate the fine and per-

haps splendid city now laid in ruins, with tens of thousands of men, women and children buried alive beneath the wreckage of their own homes. Or they will follow the seething waters in some widespread inundation, or the flames in some gigantic fire, and note the destruction of property and the sacrifice of lives that they have caused. And, as their hearts bleed for the victims of so much agony, they think that, but for sin, there would be no such disasters possible. How terrible must sin be, if a merciful God, on account of it, has so changed the whole course of events, and allowed sin to produce its natural effects upon a fallen race! We all know that, *but for sin,* man would have had no practical knowledge of suffering or of pain, and that it never entered originally into the mind of God, who wished and intended that a brief life spent here on earth, in a "garden of delights," would be followed by man's translation without death to the supernatural and celestial joys of Heaven. When, therefore, man sees all around him the devastating effects of sin, it is right and due to God that he should recognize whence all these horrors proceed, should trace them to their real cause, and should learn to estimate more accurately what a terrible evil sin is.

Realizing that God has placed us here in this

world for a few brief years, and that He has surrounded us with innumerable creatures of which all are intended to help us to save and to sanctify our souls, we should follow certain important rules in our dealing with them. For, if employed in one way, they will most certainly lead us to hell, whereas, if employed as God intends, they will just as certainly lead us to heaven and its eternal joys. A prudent man will lay down for himself the following resolutions:

(1) If any particular act or line of conduct will prove a help to me, I shall not ask myself if it be agreeable or disagreeable, but I shall adopt it;

(2) If any particular act or line of conduct will prove an obstacle to me, I shall not ask myself if it be pleasant or the reverse, but I shall reject it, abstain from it, and merit by the act of renunciation;

(3) If two or more courses suggest themselves to my mind, of which all are (let us suppose) lawful and good in themselves, I shall select that one which appears to me to offer me most help and assistance in my struggle for sanctity;

(4) I shall esteem and value all that can aid me in my efforts to sanctify my soul, but I shall

esteem highest that which can help me most, and I shall maintain an attitude of indifference to such things as are in themselves indifferent, and thus can neither assist nor retard me. In a word, I shall embrace what has power to help; I shall reject what has power to hinder; and I shall remain indifferent and neutral to all such things that are powerless either to promote or to retard my advance in virtue and perfection. In that manner, I shall always be using things as God intends, and I shall find myself constantly rising in the scale of personal sanctity.

The reason that so many fail and are lost, is because they select, not what is most useful, but what they find most pleasant; because they ask themselves, not "what will help me most to serve God," but "what will give me least trouble." Such persons are not using creatures as God intends, and will never reach perfection. Let us be wiser, and not be hindered by the ruggedness of the way, nor by the precipitousness of the path, so long as we are quite satisfied that it leads to heaven and God.

## CHAPTER XLI

### HOW TO LAY UP TREASURES FOR HEAVEN

*"Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"* (Matt., vi. 20).

ALTHOUGH a man is blessed with reason, it must yet be confessed that he is the most inconsistent of beings. He believes certain truths, and at the same time acts altogether out of harmony with them. Thus, to take a very obvious example, he firmly believes that sin (even venial sin) is a more terrible evil than any earthly misfortune, and that to offend God deliberately is a greater misfortune in itself and fraught with far more appalling consequences than sickness, disease and even death; yet, in spite of this, he is far more careful to avoid sickness and death than he is to keep free from venial faults.

Man's habitual attitude towards supernatural grace supplies us with another instance of his

extraordinary inconsistency. He knows with absolute certainty that there is nothing whatsoever in this world that can, for one moment, be compared in sterling value with divine grace. He will admit—indeed, if he be a Catholic, and *a fortiori* a priest, he will feel *bound* to admit —that all the gold and silver in the world is as dross when compared with it, that its price is beyond computation, and that even the least particle would be worth more than a king's ransom. I say he would be bound to admit this claim, because it is the clear and unmistakable doctrine of the infallible Church of God.

So much for his belief. But does he allow this doctrine to influence his conduct? Does he so strive and struggle to increase the amount of grace in his heart that we who watch him are compelled to confess he attaches immeasurably more importance to anything that can increase grace than to anything that can increase other goods, such as bodily health, success in business, money, reputation, fame, and the rest? We are forced to confess that such is not the case. His whole conduct proves that, however sincere may be his faith in this matter, his conduct contradicts it at every turn.

This is true of laymen, and alas! it is to be feared that it is largely true even of priests,

who really ought to know better. The fault is all the more lamentable and distressing because Almighty God, in His infinite love and generosity, has put in our way such an immense number and such an endless variety of ways of acquiring and storing up fresh graces. The *treasures of this world* are hard to secure; much labor and time and special opportunities are required in order to grow worldly rich. But this is not in the least true of the riches of grace. God does not put it in the power of every man to amass this world's goods, but He does put it in the power of every single human being to grow rich in what alone is of any consequence —namely, the only true and lasting riches of heaven.

In a former chapter, we saw that (1) while we are in this world, and (2) act with a pure and supernatural intention,[1] and (3) are in a state of grace, every good (or at least indifferent) act may secure for us an actual increase of grace. This is such a practical and such an important subject that we will now deal with it in some greater detail.

Let us begin by observing that this does not,

[1] Thus, our Saviour tells us (Matt., vi. 22-23): "If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But, if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome." By the eye is commonly understood the "intention" or "aim."

of course, mean that our virtuous actions, even were they absolutely perfect, do *of themselves* confer on us a right to any supernatural reward. No; what the Church teaches is that our good actions do indeed possess this marvelous effect, but only in virtue of the fact that God, in His infinite goodness and boundless love, has bound Himself by a solemn promise, in consideration of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, to bestow on us His most magnificent rewards, both here and hereafter, in proportion to the nature of the services which we render to Him. So, in that way, we really do acquire a *positive claim and right* to these wonderful supernatural recompenses, though it be solely on the strength: (a) of God's unfailing promise, and (b) the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, and (c) because He has made us His adopted children, joint heirs with Christ, and legitimate heirs of heaven.

From this it is clearly seen that God's liberality in rewarding His faithful servants surpasses all that we could ever have hoped for, and beggars all description. We can never hope to realize the full extent of His unparalleled generosity until we get to heaven, and are illuminated by the light of glory. This generosity, however, should not merely excite within us feel-

ings of the greatest gratitude, but it should also urge us to make every effort to correspond with the many opportunities which He provides us for adding to our merits, so that we may not lose any portion of such heavenly treasures.

No one can deny but that our ordinary daily life may be made up of an endless series of good works, and that even the most ordinary and commonplace position offers almost continual opportunities of supernatural merit. Of course we should make the most of these opportunities, but we should not be content with these only. We must take a leaf out of the book of the worldly wise, and, imitating the example of the successful trader and the prosperous merchant, study carefully how we may increase our gains and improve our position still further.

When we call to mind the efforts which worldlings make to acquire riches of this world, when we think of their laborious days and watchful nights, and when we consider the pains and fatigues to which they cheerfully submit in order to increase their earthly gains, to obtain some enviable post or some long-desired honor, or to rise a degree or two in the social scale, our cheeks should grow scarlet with shame and self-reproach to find that we, who call ourselves Catholics, should be so listless and indifferent regarding

the infinitely more precious rewards of eternity.

Thus, a really zealous priest, intent on gaining a high place in the Kingdom of Heaven, will not rest content to perform, however perfectly, merely the ordinary actions peculiar to his state, such as Mass, Confession, the Divine Office, meditation, spiritual reading, and the rest; but he will be diligent and on the alert to go far beyond these necessary duties in order to add still further to his "treasures in heaven." He will multiply his good works. He will undertake many voluntary acts of piety; he will seek occasions of self-denial; he will go out of his way to practise charity towards his neighbor; he will welcome rather than try to avoid trials and humiliations, knowing that all these things are, as it were, precious coins with which he may purchase more and more merit. He will lose no chance of practising both the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy; he will be constantly making ejaculatory prayers, and frequently denying himself in little things. In short, being *intensely interested in growing spiritually rich* and being fully resolved to carry out our Lord's injunction to "lay up treasures in heaven," he not only accepts the opportunities that naturally arise, but diligently *seeks others as well,* which he is well able to do, if he

be honestly enthusiastic about the things of God.

Try and picture the difference between the position of any priest after forty or fifty years of earnest endeavor and persevering effort, and the position of the same priest after forty or fifty years of carelessness and indifference. Let us suppose that a priest, in addition to what he is obliged to do, undertakes to say the Rosary every day and to practise some slight act of mortification. At the end of fifty years, he has not only said over eighteen thousand rosaries and made as many acts of mortification, but for every single one he has acquired a real increase of divine grace, the smallest particle of which surpasses in value the material contents of a thousand worlds.

And this is true of the simplest and the most commonplace actions. Let us consider such an act. Let us suppose that at the present time I hesitate to get up the instant I am called, and am slow and sluggish in arising, what an extraordinary difference it will make, if in future I arise instantly at the hour fixed, make the sign of the cross, and commend myself to God and keep on saying, while I am dressing: "Sweetest Heart of Jesus, I implore that I may love Thee daily more and more" (300 days Indulgence)!

Or consider another example. I know a presbytery where there are three priests (all good men), but, in addition to what the other two do, one makes it a rule, just before retiring to bed every night, to pay a visit of a quarter of an hour or so to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. After this he retires to rest, but, before composing himself to sleep, he turns again in thought to God, and says as fervently as possible: "Sweetest Jesus, I desire that every beat of my heart and every pulsation of my blood during my sleep may be an act of love, adoration, thanksgiving, and petition to Thee." These are very simple and easy things to do; yet, if persevered in during a long life, they must add greatly to the beauty and the splendor of the immortal crown which God is preparing for us in heaven.

To despise these little practices as too trivial to be troubled about, is pride; if we are in downright earnest, we shall value them at their true worth. In the course of even a few years they will have added enormously to our heavenly crown, and will have secured for us a most marked increase of eternal happiness. As Michelangelo replied to a friend, who was chiding him about the excessive care he was taking to get every hair and every eyelash of his pic-

ture perfect, so might I reply to my supposed objector: "You say all these are but trifles; true, but recollect that trifles make perfection, and that perfection is no trifle."

We must now consider more particularly and in detail what an increase of grace really means. It produces many admirable effects, but I should make this chapter too long if I were to dwell upon them all, so I will confine my remarks to the four most important. Every single time that I add to my store of sanctifying grace, (1) I become holier and more pleasing in the sight of God; (2) I become a more powerful advocate, so that my prayers acquire a greater impetratory power than they possessed before; (3) I diminish the amount of just punishment awaiting me on account of past sins, and shorten the term of my detention in Purgatory or even escape it altogether; (4) lastly, and most important of all, I secure for myself a higher place in heaven and a greater degree of eternal glory.

Let us consider these four points, one by one. First, I become holier because, the more sanctifying grace I have, the more do I share in the sanctity of God. By grace we are, in the words of St. Peter, "made partakers of the nature of God" (II Peter, i. 4), but some souls participate more largely than others. They who pos-

sess most grace, participate most of all. They are therefore more holy, and, on account of their greater holiness, are also more pleasing to God. But the power and influence of an advocate varies according to the degree of his favor with God. We must all have noticed the extraordinary power with God wielded by the Prophets and Patriarchs, by Abraham, Moses, and other famous servants of God. Our Blessed Lady wields more power than any other Saint of either the Old or the New Law, precisely because she is so much more "full of grace." Hence, if we wish to be able to intercede both for ourselves and for others with effect and with ever increasing efficacy, it is of the utmost importance that we should do all we can to procure a larger and larger share of grace.[3] In the third place, every meritorious action we perform cancels a part at least of the temporal punishment incurred by the commission of sin. As we are all aware, every single sin, however small, is followed by its proportional punishment, and no soul can be admitted into the unveiled presence of God until such punishment has been entirely cancelled. "Thou shalt not go out from thence, till thou repay the

[3] "Valor operis crescit cum perfectiore gradu gratiæ sanctificantis ad quem operans pervenit" (E. Génicot, S.J., p. 45).

last farthing" (Matt., v. 26). Now, this atonement *must* be made either in this life or in the next. Unless, in fact, we have been steadily and constantly paying our debt, it must be now assuming most alarming proportions. But, just as we are day by day adding to our debt, so we can, through the infinite mercy of God, be constantly paying it off. By the time death summons us before the dread Judge, we may easily, if we are earnest, have wiped away every portion of it—even "the last farthing." Besides, it must never be forgotten that hereafter our punishment will be far more painful and without any merit, while here atonement may easily be made, and is likewise most meritorious.

Time and space will allow me to speak of but one more of the many advantages of performing meritorious works, namely that, in the fourth place, they secure for us a higher place in heaven, and a greater degree of eternal glory. No one can form the slightest idea of the supernatural joys of heaven. No past experience of earthly joys, however intense, can give us the slightest inkling of even the least of them. Our eyes may have gazed on all the beauties of the world; we may have listened to the most fervid and glowing accounts of travelers and explorers concerning the wonders they have met in for-

eign lands; we may even allow our imagination to run wild, indulge our fancy to the uttermost, and picture to ourselves cities of gold, rivers of silver, and streets of precious stones. But, strive as we may, we can never draw any picture that can, even in the most distant way, resemble the beauty and the glory of the heaven that God has promised us. The words of St. Paul still remain as true as ever: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man [to conceive] what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor., ii. 9).

This of course stands to reason, for whatever may be the sources of our present joy, and however fortunate and exceptional our experiences may have been, they could never have arisen from any but *finite* causes. All existing sources of earthly pleasure both existing and merely possible, if put into one pan of the balance, would not equal a feather's weight, as compared to the *infinite* source of supernatural pleasure, which is God Himself, if put into the other pan of the balance. "I am thy reward, exceeding great." The Saints understood these things better than we do, but even they find it difficult to express their feelings in human language. Take an instance. This is what the

great St. John of the Cross writes in his second volume (p. 52): "If the soul had but one single glimpse of the grandeur and beauty of God, it would not only desire to die once in order to behold Him, but would endure joyfully a thousand most bitter deaths to behold Him even for a moment, and, having seen Him, would suffer as many deaths *again* in order to see Him for another moment."

The extraordinary thing is that, although nothing is so precious as eternal glory, yet nothing is so easy to increase. Did we appreciate it as the enlightened Saints did, it would be impossible for us to be so apathetic as we are. St. Teresa entertained such an immense esteem for even the slightest degree of heavenly glory that she declared her readiness to remain on the earth till the end of time, and to bear all the trials and labors of this life—not, observe, in order that she might secure heaven (which no doubt she already merited), but—in order that she might deserve one single additional degree of eternal glory.

Yet we, like ignorant fools, throw away every day a hundred opportunities of adding grace to grace, and consequently glory to glory. Let us try and remedy this, and set to work to "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven." Life is

passing away, the years are hurrying by, and the night cometh when no man can work, so there is no time for delay. In conclusion, I will sum up in the words of Rev. F. J. Remler, C.M.: "Each and every one of our good actions, if performed according to the conditions of merit, will infallibly be rewarded by its own corresponding increase of heavenly glory. We recite, for example, a short prayer—the work of a moment—or we endure a pain, or render a kind service to a neighbor. Here are three actions, small in themselves, but, if properly performed, each is productive of the following five rewards: (1) increase of grace; (2) remission of temporal punishment; (3) power of intercession with God; (4) a fresh supply of actual graces; and (5) finally a proportionate increase of glory in heaven. Now, if every single good work carries with it such abundant rewards, how astoundingly large and immeasurably vast must be the collective rewards of the millions upon millions of meritorious actions we can easily perform in our lifetime." "See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephes., v. 15-16).

# CHAPTER XLII

## IMMORTALITY

*"For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory"* (II Cor., iv. 17).

AMID the vast flood of solemn thoughts that comes surging up before the mind of poor, weak, mortal man, who "museth upon many things," it would be difficult to point to one so weighty and so pregnant as the thought of his personal immortality. To him indeed nothing can be of such vital import or so far-reaching in its consequences. Consequently, anyone who should dismiss or neglect this subject of meditation, would be rejecting one of the most powerful incentives to sanctity of life.

Am I mortal or immortal? Of all questions that can be proposed, that one is for me by far the most essential and significant. Am I like the gaudy butterfly that opens out its mealy wings to one bright Summer, and then is seen and heard of no more? Or am I like the solid

and impregnable rock, which stands immovable amid the ceaseless sweep of turbid waters that, like human generations, continually come and go? Does death, which destroys the body and utterly dissolves the soul's frail citadel, dissolve also the soul itself? In a word, is the end of *this* life the end of *all* life for me? Do the eyes, that close at last in the pitiless clammy sleep of the grave, never more open? Or do other sights and more glorious scenes await their opening in a land beyond the tomb?

As a man might take his stand on an edge of some jutting cliff, and peer curiously far over the measureless waste of receding waters, so in spirit I take my stand on the very confines of Time, and gaze, and gaze, and gaze into the distant and mysterious future. Like the ancient prophet, "I think upon the days of old, and I have in my mind the eternal years" (Ps., lxxvi. 6). Borne along on the wings of fancy, I note the changes wrought by the flight of time. I watch generation succeed generation like the waves of a limitless sea, and gaze upon new worlds slowly forming and maturing, and then growing old and decaying, throughout æons and æons of measureless time. And, as I press my way beyond all these changes into periods yet more remote—in fact, too far off to be realized,

and far too incalculably vast to be expressible in figures or in any known symbols—I ask myself: "Shall I, the fragile creature born but yesterday, be living still, and thinking and feeling and acting even as now? Shall I, now writing these lines, be still alive, be fully conscious, and, with no loss of personal identity, 'feel my life in every limb'? When this earth and all it contains shall have been swept into the void, when stars shall have fallen and whole constellations have crashed to their doom, and when 'a new heaven and a new earth' (II Peter, iii. 13) have slowly emerged from the ruins of the old, shall I still be in the full enjoyment of vigorous life and consciousness?" Or is existence but an uncertain and flickering flame, which the breath of death extinguishes, as a sudden puff of wind puts out a candle?

Impossible! It cannot be. For, if this cramped spot of earth were the sole theater of human activity and the only field of human endeavor, and if there were no certain promise of anything beyond, then the very foundations of morality and of human conduct, the entire *raison d'être* of virtue and justice, would be gone.

If you blot out all belief in a future state, then the end and purpose and meaning of the present state of things is left hanging in the air

without support, the duties and the obligations of the present life remain without a sanction, and man's highest and noblest impulses, and his proudest and most heroic achievements, are deprived of all meaning. Whether man was created merely to grovel and suffer awhile on earth and then to perish utterly, or whether, on the contrary, he was created to bask in the glorious sunshine of God's divine presence for ever and for ever—this is a question the answer to which will determine his whole conduct and bearing.

Happily, we are not left in suspense upon so momentous a point. Not alone sound reason, but the infallible teaching of God and of His Church likewise declare without hesitation or obscurity that the just shall enter into everlasting glory, and the wicked into everlasting punishment (Matt., xxv. 46). *"Credo . . . carnis resurrectionem, vitam æternam."*

No doubt, the fact itself we can and do accept without any difficulty; but it will influence us and affect our life and conduct only in proportion to the extent to which we realize it and bring it home to ourselves. Yet who will attempt to set before the mind of feeble man a true idea of eternity? It is indeed a word of awful import. It stands for the most stupendous of realities, yet to our dull and limited

apprehension it must ever remain but little more than a symbol. The term opens out depths which no mind can fathom, and discloses lengths and breadths which neither thought nor imagination can hope to measure. We will not deal with it. We will dismiss the thought of Eternity as being altogether too hopelessly and overwhelmingly beyond us, and will satisfy ourselves by speaking—not of eternity, but—only of Time, though here too we must speak with bated breath, since even of Time we can form but a most unworthy and inadequate estimate.

We are, of course, living in time, and are always dealing with time, and our whole existence is hemmed in by time. Time is the measure of our actual life. It regulates our duties. It determines the occupations of the day. Then, surely, it may be urged: "There can be no difficulty in understanding time."

Here a distinction must be made. Of a very brief time we may indeed form a fairly accurate notion. We can picture to ourselves, and know what is meant by a day, a year, perhaps even a century. But we know scarcely anything of more protracted periods. As soon as ever we attempt to grasp the notion, let us say, of a billion centuries, we find ourselves plunging aimlessly in a dense fog. It is but a limited number,

and may easily be expressed in figures, thus 1,000,000,000,000 (a million of millions), yet it is far too vast to be fully understood or realized by the mind of man. Yet a billion is not even an infinitesimally minute fraction of Eternity, and bears no comparison whatsoever to it.

However, the purpose of these meditations is to impress upon us, and to make us more sensibly conscious of the shortness and consequent insignificance of our present earthly life, as compared to the interminable life to follow. Now, for this purpose it will be quite enough to contemplate, not eternity itself or even anything distantly resembling it, but simply a somewhat more protracted duration of time than any which we are accustomed to deal with.

We must introduce this most important subject of contemplation by first calling attention to a simple fact in arithmetic. If I write down any numeral (let us say the numeral "1"), then all that is necessary if I wish to represent its multiplication by ten, is to place a cipher immediately after it. Thus "1" becomes "10." If I wish to multiply this second figure also by ten again, I merely add a second cipher, and "10" becomes "100." In short, it matters nothing how the initial figure grows in value, the ef-

fect of adding one extra cipher, will always be to multiply the entire sum ten times over.

Bearing this simple little mathematical truth in mind, I set myself down in the vast African desert. As far as the eye can reach on all sides of me, from north to south and from east to west, I can descry nothing but fine sand. Not only on the surface, but for many fathoms beneath my feet, there is nothing else to be found. This sand lies thick upon everything. It coats the very leaves of the solitary tree beneath which I am stretched. The very air is thick with tiny falling particles, and the restless winds keep carrying great clouds of them over my head. They enter into my mouth; I draw them in with every breath; they lie in every fold of my garments and in every crease of my cloak.

Now to my task. Seated there in that immense arid plain, I take out my pencil, and write down the numeral "1." Let it stand for one complete century. Then I place beside it one grain of sand, to represent a cipher. Then a second grain of sand to represent a second cipher, then a third, and a fourth, and then a fifth, each representing an additional cipher.

Now, observe, how this carries us immediately far beyond the furthermost bounds of all recorded time. I moisten the tip of one little

finger, and press it on the dry sand. See! there are just twelve small grains adhering to it. I place these twelve grains after the figure "1," to represent twelve ciphers. Thus, I have formed the figure 1,000,000,000,000—representing a billion centuries.

Alas! what manner of mind is mine! My task is scarcely yet begun, and already I have passed altogether beyond what my mind can picture or conceive. From the creation of Adam to the present day is thought by some to be about sixty centuries. What an infinitesimal fraction of a billion! But let us proceed. Now I scoop up a handful of sand, which I hold in my palm. Selecting from this little store, just one grain at a time, I proceed to lay them, one after the other, in a line after the twelve that already represent the billion. By this means, I raise the billion to a trillion (or a million millions of millions). How many grains of sand have I taken from the palm of my hand to represent that number? Only six. My palm looks just as full as ever. Yet the figure already formed indicates a duration so inconceivable and so unwieldy that my mind cannot deal with it. It sweeps me out of my depth. Though I am still only on the fringe of the problem, and may say that I have not yet begun to make the cal-

culation, yet I am already paralyzed and dumbfounded. What the figure will amount to by the time I have arranged all the rest of the grains within my palm as so many additional naughts to the original figure, will surpass the wit of man to conceive. No words exist in which to express it, nor can even the most gifted mathematician hope to grapple with it.

But the period so represented is not eternity. It is not even a very long time; or, if it seems long, that is solely when it is compared with the brief moments of our present experience. When compared to the figures we are coming to, even a trillion of centuries is less than the tick of a clock compared to a century of years. For observe, as soon as I have used up every grain contained in the palm of my hand, I start upon the miles upon miles of sand that form the desert until I have used up the very last particle. Then I seize upon those which are floating in the air, and which form the immense sand-clouds. That task might occupy me for ages, yet however inconceivably enormous may be the sum represented at any particular moment, remember that that *entire sum will be multiplied ten times over* on the addition of the next grain. So soon as every existing grain is in position, and every one is used up, I must proceed to

break the rocks asunder and pound the great cliffs and gigantic mountain ranges into powder, that they may provide me with fresh grains, to be employed as the previous ones.

How long must this labor last? Until the whole substance of the entire earth has been used up, as well as the substance of the stars and planets. And what is the duration so represented? Who will compute it? who will fathom it? What is its length? Do not ask, for it were useless to do so. No power will enable us to raise such a figure into the field of consciousness; one might as well try to hold the vast ocean in the hollow of one hand.

There are, however, two statements concerning the period which may be made with absolute certainty. The *first* is that, however unthinkable the period may be, it is not eternity; it is not even an infinitesimal fraction of eternity. Could we present such a period to eternity, eternity would laugh at such a duration as though it were but a fleeting moment. Indeed we may say that eternity would lap it up in its measureless jaws, just as the gigantic Niagara might lap up a single small drop of rain, distilled by a passing cloud, wholly unconscious of having received any increase whatever in its bulk or any addition to its volume. Eternity cannot be

manufactured out of time, nor can it be expressed in terms of time. The two stand on a different footing, and rest on different planes.

The *second* statement, equally indisputable, is that, although surpassing all possible calculations, yet the period so described is a definite one. So certainly definite is it in sooth that finally a moment must actually come when the last moment of the last century so represented will arrive. Yet, when that moment is reached, eternity will still be, as it were, just beginning, and we shall have made no step in advance. Now, if we call $x$ the duration represented by the numeral "1," followed by as many ciphers as there are grains of sand in the universe, we might give that value (that is to say, the value of $x$) to our first figure "1," and start afresh, putting grain after grain after it to represent ciphers. Yet, even then it would bring us no nearer eternity itself.

What is the duration of man's short life, when compared to $x$? Yet it is much more than the duration of $x$, when this is compared to eternity. What then is man's life on earth, when compared, not to $x$, but to eternity?

Eternity is one of the perfections of God, so it must be, like Him, incomprehensible. It is a duration which has no end. Scientific men in

these days undertake to measure everything. The height of the mountains, the depths of the oceans, the distance of the stars, the age of the earth, and all else they profess to measure. But even they cannot measure eternity. A day will come, when it will be said of him, who writes or reads this page: "He has *begun* his eternity," but it will never be said: "He is quarter- or half-way through his eternity." To the just and the good there is no thought so consoling and so restful as eternity; and to the wicked and the sinful there is no thought so bitter or so disconcerting. In a very few years, I must be in eternity; heaven or hell must be my everlasting abode. Take two priests, one now in heaven and the other in the bottomless pit. If we could question them, they would make one of two answers to any questions we may put—either "never" or else "for ever." How long will the good priest continue to enjoy the Beatific Vision? For ever. When will the bad priest be rescued from his torments? Never. When will the delights of the first begin to diminish or to become less intense? Never! Never! How much longer must the agony of the latter endure? For ever and for ever!

With this thought before him, who can fail to understand the tremendous responsibility of

his present life! For, although so short, yet the whole of eternity depends upon it. The very fact that we have to make the choice ourselves, and that the endless future will undoubtedly be determined by us, is almost overwhelming. Yet it is most certain. "Before you are life (eternal life) and death (eternal death). And that which you shall choose, you shall have" (Eccles., xv. 18). Are we really conscious of the full weight of our responsibility? As we go about our various duties, does this thought follow us, and make us cautious and watchful? Do we live and act as men who know and feel that they are daily and hourly—yea, even minute by minute—building up and forming and fashioning their eternal future, or else wrecking and ruining it? When temptation comes upon us, and we are urged to break God's command, do we realize exactly *what it is* that we are asked to do? Do we weigh fully the eternal consequences, and the tremendous and lasting effects of even one moment of weakness and transgression? Do we ask, as the Saints were wont to ask, before every resolve: "What relation has this to eternity (*Quid hoc ad æternitatem*)?" Do we acknowledge by our very life and conduct that "whatever is not eternal, is nothing" (*Quidquid æternum non est, est nihil*).

# CHAPTER XLIII

## THE THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

*"Man shall go into the house of his eternity"* (Eccles., xii. 5). *"Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred"* (Eccles., ix. 1). *"He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall"* (I Cor., x. 12).

IN the preceding chapter, we strove to help the reader to form some notion of the eternity into which he is soon about to enter, by inviting him to imagine the length of time represented by the numeral "1," followed by as many ciphers as there are grains of sand in the material universe. Although such a figure is of course no fraction—no, not even an *infinitesimal* fraction—of eternity, yet it is so inconceivably great that it helps the imagination to form a useful notion of the endless period awaiting us, when this brief life has run its course.

Yet, men are so differently constituted that such an illustration may not appeal to all minds as readily as some more simple illustrations that are sometimes suggested. We will, therefore,

now put before our readers a far less difficult and complicated one.

For the purpose of our illustration, we must begin by asking our readers to suppose the earth and everything upon it to be composed not of land and water, but to consist throughout of solid brass. The immense continents, with their wide-stretching plains and their vast ranges of snow-covered mountains, as well as their fathomless seas, are all (according to our hypothesis) hard, solid and adamantine brass. Picture such an earth floating in space. That is our first supposition. After we have done our best to realize its colossal proportions, we are invited to imagine that once in a million centuries a bird alights upon it, and makes a slight scratch upon its surface by sharpening its beak. Note that the scratch is nothing to speak of, and only a tiny and perhaps almost microscopical particle of the brass has been rubbed off. Granting that this continues and that a particle is destroyed at each visit, it is *certain* that a day must come (however distant), when nothing of the earth would be left. But what we have to ask ourselves is: "How long would it take before the bird, in this way, could rub off and destroy the entire ball of brass? How long should we have to wait before a single mountain-range,

such as the Himalayas or the Alps, would wholly disappear from view? How long would it be before both North and South America would be scratched off the solid brass globe, as well as the fathomless oceans of solid brass that surround them?" Once we grant the hypothesis, reason forces us to believe: (1) that such a moment would and must at last come; and (2) that the said period would be a limited one, though it might well look to us an eternity.

Now picture to yourself an immortal soul in prison, who has just seen the bird arrive, scratch with its beak, and depart, and who knows that a million centuries must pass away before it will come again. And ask yourself what consolation would it be to him, if he knew that he would be restored to liberty, when the bird had worn away the last remnant of the brass ball.

We must keep well in mind *three* thoughts that would occupy such an immortal soul, looking through his prison bars: the *first* is the ghastly interval that must elapse between each visit of the bird; the *second* is the utter insignificance of the effect produced by it at each visit; and the *third* is the ages upon ages that must elapse before there could be any change whatever at all perceptible to the human eye.

Let us suppose that the bird begins its work

of slow destruction upon the roof of one of the skyscrapers of New York. How long would it take it to destroy enough of the skyscraper for even the keenest eye to be able to mark the diminution of its bulk? And how much longer for it to level the whole of even that one building to the ground? Yet, when that has at last been scratched away, the bird would be but at the very beginning of its task. Only a trifling fraction of one city has been worn away, and all the soundless seas, the broad continents, and the snow-clad mountains, now composed of rigid brass, are still untouched. Yet, we are assured by spiritual writers that, if any one of the lost souls were to be told by God that on the completion of such an inexpressibly vast period his sufferings would cease, he would go almost wild with joy, because even such a period, unthinkable as it is, is nothing at all compared to eternity.

We speak of eternity, but we must never forget that there are *two very different eternities,* in one of which we must most assuredly soon find ourselves. To enter *the one* is, as it were, to plunge into a boundless ocean of delights, where every conceivable joy, happiness, gratification, enchantment and ecstasy will be assembled and enjoyed to the full, without any shadow of pain, sorrow or anxiety to disturb

our perfect rapture and without any fear of ever losing or forfeiting any particle of it. To enter *the other* is to be plunged headlong into a bottomless pit of raging and never to be extinguished fire—into an abode of unadulterated anguish and torment, with no friend to utter a word of comfort and not one hour's sleep in which our bitterness might be forgotten—an abode where no prayer will be heard, no cry of agony heeded, where the endless eternity continues without change and without hope. In other words, there is the *eternity of heaven,* where the fervent priests will share in the infinite happiness of God Himself, and there is the *eternity of hell,* where unworthy priests will share for ever in the indescribable torments awaiting the devil and his angels (Matt., xxv. 41).

The entire human race must eventually be divided between these two eternities. I who am now writing, and you who will read these lines, are continually advancing nearer and nearer to one or the other of these two eternities. As St. Ambrose observes: "Into this or that eternity I shall inevitably fall" (*In Psalm. cviii*). There is no possible escape. If I do not gain the heaven of the saintly priest, then I must endure the hell of the unworthy priest. I shall be either with God, basking in the bright-

ness of His divine and joy-giving presence, or else I shall be for ever separated from Him by a great chasm and burn in quenchless fires where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt., viii. 12). Which of these destinies will be mine? Alas! I know not; it is impossible to say. But what I do know is that only a few steps separate me from it. I stand on the shore of eternity (*Sto ad litus æternitatis*). A sudden heart-attack, the bursting of a blood-vessel, an unexpected fall, an accident on the railway or in the street—and I have burst the frail barrier of time, and am in eternity.

My eternity depends upon my present life. "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (Gal., vi. 8). "Our good and bad actions," says St. Bernard, "are the seeds of eternity." We perform them. We perhaps think no more of them; they are, as it were, lost to us and buried, but we shall marvel at the harvest that will be found waiting for us when we pass into the next world. But, whether this abundant harvest will be for me a harvest of rewards or of punishments, depends entirely upon the kind of seed I have sown. Whichever it be, it will belong wholly to me, and be a source of immense gain or of irreparable loss. Observe that I am daily, perhaps hourly af-

fecting my eternity. Thus, let us suppose, a good or a bad thought has passed through my mind; a charitable or an uncharitable word has escaped from my lips; a momentary act of virtue or of vice, scarcely noticed at the time, has been performed. What is the result? That passing thought, that flying word, that brief act have all been discharged into eternity, and have become irrevocably recorded, each with its exact measure of reward or of punishment. There it will remain fixed and as indestructible as eternity itself. The fact is that, from instant to instant, I am constantly doing that which all the endless ages of eternity cannot undo. I yield to a temptation, and the effect is eternal. I utter a fervent prayer, I bestow an alms, or I check some evil inclination: it has taken but a moment, but the effect endures for ever. Perhaps I commit some grave sin: the pleasure lasted but an instant, but (unless expiated by sincere repentance) its poison will adhere to my soul to torment and to torture it literally for all eternity. According to the mythological fable, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock, where a vulture consumed his liver daily; during the night, it grew again, and thus his torment was ceaseless. But, if I offend, *in my case the punishment will be no fable,* but stern reality. On the other

hand, an act of faith or of religion, of humility or of charity, although lasting but an inappreciable second, will procure for me eternal delights and an intenser love of God, provided I do not annul the effects by some grievous sin.

By reason of the many graces which God gives me, and of the efficacious helps which He affords me, I am made in very truth the arbiter of my fate, and it will really be just what I choose to make it. This thought should make me tremble, and yet at the same time it should inspire me with hope. It should make me tremble, when I reflect on my past weaknesses and imprudences; but it should fill me with hope, when I recall the splendid graces that God continues to offer me, and remember that, if I only correspond with them, my salvation is secure.

My eternity depends upon my present short life. What is time when compared to eternity? What is any period which finishes, when compared to a period which has no end? What, above all, is my earthly life, which vanishes like a dream and disappears as a vapor, when compared to eternity? Ask the great Saints; ask St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier or St. Alphonsus, how they regard their days of arduous missionary labors and sufferings, and they will reply:

"For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (II Cor., iv. 17). On the other hand, ask the worldly and reprobate priests, now sunk in the quenchless flames,[1] how they regard the sinful indulgences and the culpable neglect of duty which disgraced their lives, and they will answer: "All these things are passed away like a shadow, and like a messenger that runneth on, and like a ship that passeth through the waves. . . . Such things as these the sinners said in hell" (Wis., v. 9-10, 14). Alas! for them such reflections are come too late; but you and I, thank God, still have both time and opportunity to profit by their awful example, and may yet set our house in order. Yes, there is just time enough, if we set about our reformation at once, but we have no time to lose. "This therefore I say, brethren: the time is short" (I Cor., vii. 29); and this time, so short and so precious, must be utilized without delay.

As soon as ever we realize that an eternity of infinite delight and an eternity of infinite agony are quivering in the balance, we become

[1] Lest we should imagine that there is no danger for us, let me recall the words of the great St. Chrysostom: "I do not think that there are many among priests who are saved, but much more who perish."

vividly conscious that no precautions can be too great. Nothing that I can do to render my eternity happy, can be considered excessive.

Though my earthly life is but a moment, yet upon that moment my eternal destiny depends. "O appalling moment upon which an eternity depends!" If only I can keep that solemn truth steadily before my mind it will teach me prudence and caution. It will encourage me to avoid the many dangerous occasions of sin, and will urge me to avail myself of every means of grace and of every spiritual help that comes in my way. As the great St. Gregory says: "No security is too great when eternity is at stake." This thought, when once grasped, has rendered youths and mere children wiser than their elders. St. Teresa, when still a child, would withdraw into solitude in order to solve the question: "You may be eternally happy or eternally miserable; it depends on yourself. Choose, Teresa, choose!" Similarly, the boy, St. Stanislas, used to repeat to himself: "Remember, Stanislas, you are born, not for present things, but for future; not for time, but for eternity." And St. Aloysius, before taking up any work, or applying himself to any task, would ask himself: "How will this affect my eternity?"

The thought is all-powerful and especially

useful when one is subject to violent temptation. We are offered some attractive pleasure, if only we will break God's law; or we are promised escape from some distressing pain or humiliation, if only we will refuse God obedience. But the victory is practically won, as soon as we have time to think: "A moment's delight and an eternity of suffering" (in the first case), or (in the second): "A moment's suffering and an eternity of delight." Once we contrast the momentary with the eternal, the victory is assured.

Let us end with the cheering words of "The Imitation of Christ" (III, xlvii):

*"It is not long thou hast to labor here, nor shalt thou be always oppressed with sorrow.*

*"Wait a little, and thou shalt see a speedy end of sorrow and suffering. . . .*

*"Do what thou hast to do; labor faithfully in My vineyard, and I will be thy recompense.*

*"Write, read, sing, lament, keep silence, pray, bear adversities manfully: eternal life is worth all these and greater combats.*

*"Peace shall come on one day, which is known to the Lord. And there shall be no alternation of night and day, such as there is now; but light everlasting, infinite brightness, stable peace, and safe repose."*

A. M. D. G.

248.62
V.465

865

VAUGHAN, JOHN S.

AUTHOR

The Minister of Christ

TITLE

Vol.II

| DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME | ROOM NUMBER |
| --- | --- | --- |

865